

THE LOCUST AND THE LADYBIRD

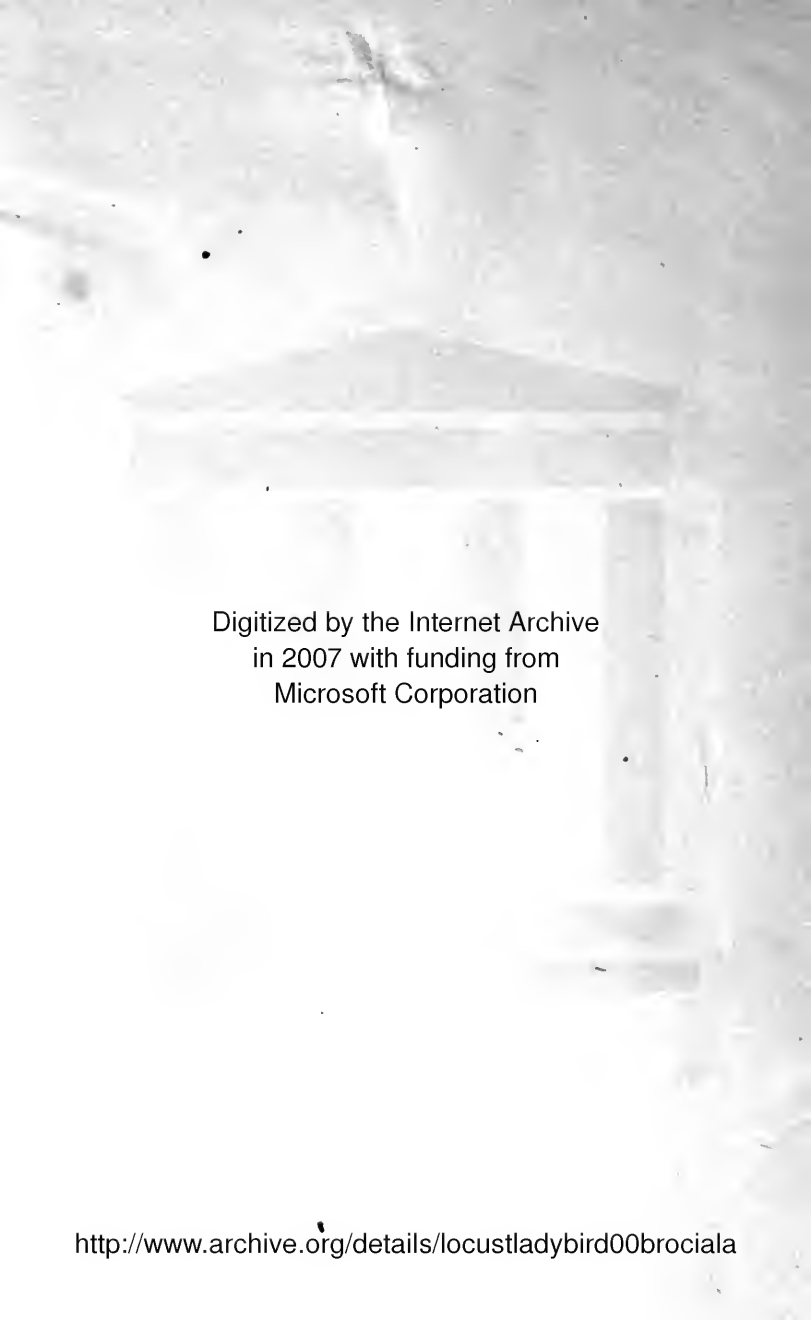


ARCHIBALD BIRT



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THE LOCUST
AND
THE LADYBIRD





The open road and no speed limit.



Timbergetters' Camp, Currumbin Creek.

THE LOCUST AND THE LADYBIRD

By

ARCHIBALD BIRT

(DR A. B. BROCKWAY)

AUTHOR OF "CASTLE CZVARGAS."

"Now Green is the colour of Youth and of Love,
But Red is the colour of Pain."—G. I..

LONDON

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TO MY THREE GIRLS:

NELL

DODO

BIDDY

1467874



Cupid and my Campaspe play'd
At cards for kisses; Cupid paid :
He stakes his quiver, bow, and arrows,
His mother's doves and team of sparrows;
Loses them, too; then down he throws
The coral of his lip, the rose
Growing on's cheek (but none knows how);
With these the crystal of his brow,
And then the dimple on his chin;
All these did my Campaspe win :
At last he set her both his eyes—
She won, and Cupid blind did rise.
O Love! has she done this to thee?
What shall, alas! become of me?

—J. LYLIE.



AUTHOR'S NOTE

I DESIRE to record my thanks to my friend Mr Charles Martin for his kindness in looking over the MS. of *The Locust* and *The Ladybird*, for his suggestions, and for correcting any mistakes in spelling.

The photographs from which illustrations Nos. 10, 11, 23, and 24 were obtained were purchased; for Nos. 22 and 31 I am indebted to Chauffeur Jeff. The rest are from my own camera.

To Mr and Mrs C. N. and A. M. Williamson

Dear Sir and Madam,

If imitation be the sincerest form of flattery, then may I be considered to have tried to flatter you in the most sincere manner. My slight effort is, however, so inferior in every way to your delightful books, that it may be difficult to discover any resemblance between "Set in Silver" and "The Locust and The Ladybird," except in the prominence of the motor-car, and in the epistolatory nature of both stories. In my defence, I can only say that I had purposed writing such a tale as this, in letter form, before I read the letters of Audrie, now Lady Pendragon. If I have been able to arouse your interest in Australian scenery—and other things, and if I have your forgiveness, I shall be satisfied—almost.

I am, your admiring reader,

ARCHIBALD BIRT.

*Brisbane, Queensland,
January 1910.*

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THE LOCUST AND THE LADYBIRD

CHAPTER I

[Being passages of a letter from Mrs James Chapman, of Reading, England, to her brother, Aston Perry, M.D., F.R.C.S., of Brisbane, Queensland, and the reply.]

Reading, *Oct. 10th*, 1909

My dear Aston,

This is to wish you very many happy returns of your birthday. It should reach you before the day, but I am writing now because we are all packing for our annual holiday (Brittany, this year). We start next week . . . I am sending, too, from myself, "Set in Silver," Mr and Mrs C. N. Williamson's last. I am sure you will enjoy it, and I am going to ask you to promise me that if you ever again take a holiday tour in your car you will write an account of it for me ;

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will you? . . . James and the children send love and best wishes, and we are all looking forward to seeing you next year.

I am, your loving sister,
Amy.

Brisbane, *Nov. 17th*, 1909

My dear Amy,

Very many thanks for your kind presents and good wishes. James's Thermos flask has already proved useful, and I read "Set in Silver" with much enjoyment last night! Give my love and thanks to the nephews and kiss the niece, bless her! and tell them that I, too, am looking forward to next year, and to them and you. O yes! I promise to write long, dull, descriptive letters of any motor-car trip I may take, provided that you promise to read them. I have "struck a patch" just now and am very busy, so excuse more this time.

Many thanks, love.

Your affectionate brother,
Aston.

CHAPTER II

From Dr Aston Perry to Mrs James Chapman.

Hotel Pacifique,
Tweed Heads,
New South Wales.
Nov. 22nd, 1909

My dear Amy,

Here begins, already, the first of the motor-trip letters; though, when I wrote last week, I little thought how soon I should have to fulfil my easily made promise to you. How it has come about that I am taking a holiday is in this wise. You remember old George Lidney? I had him home with me from Rugby for the holidays when he was 13 and I 15. I do not think that you have seen him since, but you must often have heard me speak of him; for we were at Oxford together and had the time of our lives there. It was he, don't you remember, who in his excitement at the finish of my half-mile championship

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swim against Porter of Balliol, fell into the river and was fished out with a boat-hook—several boat-hooks. To my huge delight and astonishment he turned up in my consulting-room on Thursday, and, as coolly as you please, suggested that I take him for a run for a week or two in my motor! (These men whose time is not money!) He is spending a few months in Australia, and wants to see the country more intimately than is possible from a steamboat deck or a railway-carriage window. As it happened, my patch having petered out, I was able to arrange to be away from the practice for a week or two, though I had not intended to take a holiday until the great long-looked-forward-to-and-much-talked-about English visit of next year. So here we are! But I am getting on too fast! For I shall take you at your word, and give you a full and particular account of the trip.

First, I must tell you that George is the same silent, blushing chap as of yore. He hasn't altered a bit except that he has grown a moustache (and says that he is going to grow a beard likewise). He is somewhere near 5 feet 6 inches, and weighs $9\frac{1}{2}$ stone or so, small but wiry; his thatch is dark and a good deal thicker than mine! Seeing him again has bucked me up wonderfully,

for, after all, there are no friends like the old friends. . . .

We decided to go to Sydney, and as I had already motored there *via* New England, to go by the "Northern Rivers," and the roads between Brisbane and the New South Wales border being execrable, I sent the larger of my two cars, a 15-20 Humber, on by train to Tweed Heads, under the care of William the Silent, my faithful and invaluable "chauffeur and generally useful." We followed, this morning, by an "express" train that takes four hours to accomplish 69 miles. Not an interesting journey, but listen to the names of some of the places we passed through: Yéerongpilly, Móoróoka, Pímpamá(h), Cóomera, Mólendínar, Neráng, Worongary, Múdgeerabá(h), Tállebúdgera, Bóoningbá(h), Currúmbin (where we crossed a creek of that name, and I took a snap from the carriage window of a timber-getter's camp), Cóolangátta. They sound blackfellowish and bushrangery, don't they? But they looked sleepy enough in the hot November sunshine.

I have already been able to point out to George something which he had not observed before. In a paddock (about three miles by two) along the line, a number of our long-tailed horses were

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scattered in pairs, and each pair stood close together, head to tail. It would be nice to believe that one said to the other, "You flick the mosquitoes and flies from my face, and I'll do the same for you," for that is why they stand so. But one fears that each takes up his position that he may be protected from the biting insects by the other's swishing tail, unconscious that he is performing a like kind office to his mate!

The terminus of the line is here at Tweed Heads in N. S. Wales, Coolangatta, a few yards further back being in Queensland. A narrow belt of waste land enclosed by barbed wire fences serves to separate the two States and to prevent tick-infected cattle and horses from straying across the border carrying their ticks with them, and also divides the little township of Tweed Heads into a small N. S. Wales bit and a smaller Queensland bit.

We had meant to start away at once for Murwillumbáh, but it was so beautiful and peaceful here that we decided to stay until to-morrow. We are not in a hurry, and I wanted George to see the Heads.

As soon as we had had lunch we climbed Observation Hill, and were rewarded by the glorious view from its flat "table-top." It was a



"Hill, river and valley . . . and desolate gum."



"Thick shade . . . and the border-line fence."

perfect afternoon, with a light fleecy-clouded sky and a gentle breeze which fanned us into some semblance of coolness. As we faced the east the tiny straggling township lay at our feet, with Point Danger and its signalling flagstaff about a mile away, and beyond, the great tumbling Pacific breaking in huge rollers upon the dangerous shore. Turning to the west, Mount Warning seemed about an hour's walk distant, though really thirty miles off, and between it and us the Australian coastal landscape of river and hill and valley, of bright green sugar-cane upon the mountain slopes, with here and there in lonely simplicity a small farm homestead, and, pervading the view, the thickly-growing desolate gum-tree scrub, and, puffing along on its way back to Brisbane, like a child's toy, the train by which we had come this morning. ("Toiling in Town now is horrid . . . Thought gets dry in the brain.") . . . The descent from Observation Hill is naturally easier than the climb, but, as soon as we were sheltered from the sea-breeze, our skins began to act freely again, despite our light summer clothing and the thick shade of the trees on the pathway, marked on one side by the border-line fence. . . . But it is great to be out of reach of the telephone bell and the telegram boy ;

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and I dropped ten of my 35 years as I talked and talked like a schoolgirl and George listened and listened like a clam. (Have clams ears, by the way?)

Just now, as I am writing what I fear may be the longest of my tour-letters (and we haven't boarded the Humber yet), George is occupying his leisure moments killing, or trying to kill, the ubiquitous mosquito, and emitting loud words beginning with explosive consonants. Mosquitoes don't worry me much now, thank the Lord, and while George is handy, no mosquito epicure will smell twice at me. Do you know that the biting mosquito is of the gentler sex? Hence, doubtless, its avoidance of non-marrying me. Moreover, I am a working man and George is one of the idle rich, and his blood is presumably of a richer flavour. . . .

We have now returned from a surf bathe on the Queensland side, and are feeling clean and kind and rather sticky. . . . The world feels good to-night. We have a kindly feeling for everything except sharks (and George might add, mosquitoes). How I should have enjoyed swimming out half a mile or so into the Pacific, to lie on my back looking at the stars and the mysterious sky, but I had to content myself with the champagne of the surf and an arm-over-arm sprint.



A surf bathe on the Queensland side.



Point Danger.

Sharks are a pity ; though the ocean specimen is not so black as he is painted—he finds quite enough food among the smaller fry of the deep, and does not willingly attack anything so large as man. It is different, of course, with the offal-feeders of the rivers ; their appetite is vitiated, and they will eat dog or man or anything they can lay teeth to. . . . Next year, in August, at Ventnor, I shall challenge you to a quarter-mile race ! Are you game ? I am glad that Neville and Roderick show so much swimming promise—chips of the elderly block?—there's nothing like it ! I have kept up my swimming so far as it is possible in a place so disgracefully insufficiently supplied with baths as Brisbane is. . . . But I must not grumble on so delightful a night as this. We can hear the waves breaking on Point Danger, and indeed, I must go and have a look at them by moonlight. . . . A great mass of cloud is lying on the sea like heaped-up snow made pink with the dying rays of the sun . . . the pink is fading fast as I write, for we have a very short twilight, almost none, and the heap of snow is melting into grey sky. . . . The tide is almost low and it is quite calm, only a gentle breeze ruffling the surface of the Tweed and Terranora rivers. The light of the setting

sun is upon the roughly-wooded slopes of the Point, and the red tiles of the roof of the Pilot's house are in sharp contrast to the dull green foliage and the grey-blue sky. I am sorry that the sun does not set behind the point—it is setting behind Observation Hill, the view between consisting of uninspiring, untidy backyards. The sea and air are exquisitely clear now, and in half an hour it will be as dark as at any hour of the night. . . . Fingal light is twinkling out its warning—"Rocks!" And ever as I look the outlines are fading; the dull green is fast becoming dark and will soon be black. . . . Now, Orion appears, as you would think, upside down, but to us like a huge giant for ever plunging midway between sky and sea. . . .

We have clambered over the boulders at Point Danger, to the music of the breakers, rolling in splendidly with all the Pacific Ocean behind them. . . . I have "At the Sign of the Lyre" with me, and have had the hardihood to compose an extra verse or two—here is one of them:

"Or leading her across the shelly sand,
 To where the rollers broke with startling shock,
 That he might feel in his her little hand,
 And help her carefully from rock to rock;
 Hoping to meet again that trusting look
 From eyes as fresh and bright as bubbling brook."

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How do you like it? I am so grateful to you for introducing me to Austin Dobson! . . .

Summer lightning is flickering almost continuously behind the white masses of horizon-cloud which disappeared with the going of the sun, flickering like theatre lightning, with now and then a sudden vicious flash of zig-zag fire that cannot be imitated, and which seems to cut the cloud in two with vivid flame. . . .

So, good night, my dear sister, and heigh for to-morrow and the open road and no speed limit!

Your affectionate brother,

Aston.

P.S.—Thank goodness, George is as quiet asleep as awake—he doth not snore. I should wake him with a boot if he did; for in Australian-hotel fashion we share a two-little-bedded room.

A.P.

P.P.S.—Is it not an excellent circumstance that I can do with so little sleep? An average of three hours is quite enough for me when I am holiday-making—else my letters would be shorter? Good night!

A.P.

CHAPTER III

Byron Bay, *Nov. 23rd*, 1909

My dear Amy,

I posted to you this morning from Tweed Heads, and now I am writing again from Byron Bay, and our adventures have began. . . . But I must be sane, and begin where I left off last night, or, rather, early this morning. It seems a week ago, so much may happen in one day. . . .

I was awake early and watched the stars go out with the coming of the dawn, last to go, except for Jupiter, being our glorious simple Southern Cross with its two pointers. I awoke George and we stole out to get a bathe. We saw the sun rise over the sea, and as we stood and watched him George repeated those wonderful lines of William Drummond of Hawthornden:—

"Phoebus, arise!
 And paint the sable skies
 With azure, white and red:
 Rouse Memnon's mother from her Tithon's bed
 That she may thy career with roses spread. . . .
 Spread forth thy golden hair
 In larger locks than thou wast wont before,
 And Emperor-like decore
 With diadem of pearl thy temples fair. . . .
 The winds all silent are,
 And Phoebus in his chair
 Ensaffroning the sea and air
 Makes vanish every star.
 Night like a drunkard reels
 Beyond the hills, to shun his flaming wheels. . . .
 Here is the pleasant place—
 And nothing wanting is save She, alas! "

"Wonderful!" I exclaimed, "wonderfully beautiful! but, old chap, we don't want any 'she'? Mind you," I added, "they're right enough in their place, and the old world couldn't well do without them, but for a holiday pure and simple commend me to one male companion, eh?" . . . Amy! to think that I made those foolish remarks only sixteen hours ago!

It was a very calm, clear morning, and the tide was low, so there was no surfing, but we went round to Sharks Bay—so called because young sharks are often seen there preying upon the small fry which abound near the sandy shore—and had

a delightful swim. I challenged George to a race giving him ten yards start, the race to end when I caught him! So at the word "Go" from me we splashed off, trudgeoning for all we were worth, and the beggar took more catching than I had expected! In fact I touched his foot just as he stopped in shallow water. Have I gone off, or am I not so fast as I thought? I rallied George on his swiftness in the water, and all he said was, "You taught me!" but he was evidently pleased. We got back to our hotel in plenty of time, and I dressed leisurely. When I came into the breakfast-room the second Georgian surprise was effected. It was my birthday—not that that should have been a surprise, but I had forgotten it, for these anniversaries recur very quickly nowadays, and for the reason that George's birthday and mine are so close together (his is on 2nd December) we always remember each other's. George was not in the room, but on my plate was a little parcel addressed to me in his neat hand, and containing a delicately bound copy of "Songs and Sonnets" by "G. L." And in a flash it came to my slow-working brain that our favourite sonnet-writer was none other than my old friend George Lidney, who at that moment was hiding from me somewhere. "Come here,

you scoundrel!" I cried, as I found him pacing up and down outside, blushing shamefacedly, "do you mean to tell me that you wrote these?" and I held the book before him while I gripped his shoulder. George only grinned and went on blushing. "You old serpent," I went on, "whom I have patronised and nourished in my unsuspecting bosom, and to whom I have recited my futile stuff; to think that I have been reveling in your things these years and never suspected its source!" (I wonder his blushes didn't consume him). "Come inside and be thanked and eat some breakfast."

While we ate I read aloud to him some of his own sonnets, with one or two of which I was already familiar from having come across them in the *Speaker*; but I read them now with much more appreciation that I knew their authorship. . . .

By the time that breakfast was over we decided that my birthday and such a gift required some meditation, so, telling William, who was ready with the car, to go and have a swim while we took a walk, we strolled over the bridge which spans the Terranora, and on to the spit of sand which separates its waters from those of the Tweed river. As we glanced back at the lazily awaken-

ing township, we saw a handsome car standing outside one of the hotels, but beyond a remark as to its beauty thought no more of it, having no power of fore knowledge. . . . I was very thoughtful, for the surprise that George was a poet still held me: that the writer of these exquisite things should be old George, whose general conversation might be represented something like this:—

George.—"I say, Aston!"

I. "Hullo!" George waves his arms in front of him and says nothing.

I.—"Well, what about it?"

George.—"Very pretty, isn't it?"—This kind of thing from the man whose descriptions of Surrey and Cornwall are the envy of his fellows! I have written rather a lot about this, but I know that you will be interested, and the surprise of it will last me some time.

The spit of sand that we were on gets narrow and narrower till it ends in the stone wall which the N. S. Wales Government has built to render more navigable the swift waters of the Tweed. On the further bank of the Terranora, on what looked an ideal spot for the purpose, we saw an elaborate camp of three tents, one of which looked almost large enough for a school treat,

and as we came opposite to the camp we met three children wading across the river, accompanied by an elderly gentleman whom they loudly addressed as "uncle." As the water got deeper their shouts of glee were very refreshing, especially those of the smallest of them, and I could imagine the uncle, like Austin Dobson's "PolypHEME,"

"Holding himself for all devotion paid
By that clear laughter of the little maid."

They got safely across, the smallest girl getting wet to her waist, and seemed satisfied; at any rate they proceeded to return in the same damp manner, being met on the other side by their solicitous mother, who doubtless sent them in to one of the tents to change into drier garments. We noticed that the uncle made off as though to avoid the scathing comments of his sister. . . . Why is it that so many children who live at the seaside all the year round are white and even pale, while youngsters such as those we had just seen are as brown as berries? Can you tell me, O experienced mother of three? It is not a riddle!

As we reach the mainland again we saw a small octopus, measuring about two feet across, which a visitor had just hooked and landed. A

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local inhabitant told us that the blacks (of whom we have seen none yet) will put an arm into the water if there are no rocks about, and allow the octopus to cling on, securing it in this way for food, and as bait for large fish; but that if the octopus can find rock to which to adhere, the strongest line will be broken before the creature will let go its hold, and that its prehensile power ceases as soon as it is out of the water.

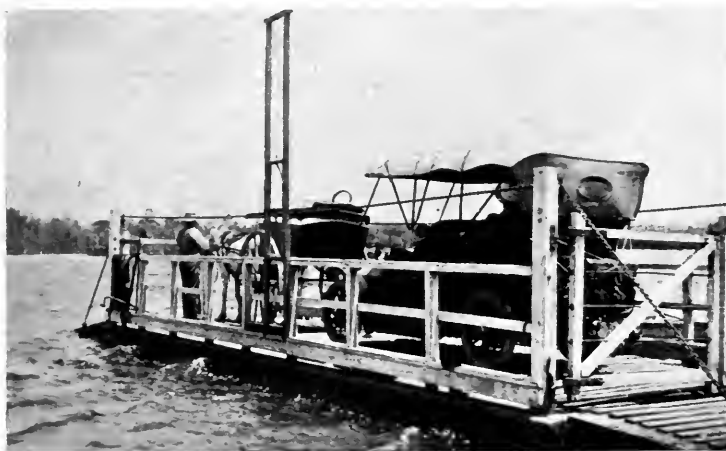
When we got back to our hotel, we found William ready for us; he is very keen to get going. He seems to think that I may get a telegram at any moment summoning me back!

George has named the car "The Locust," because he says that it eats up the miles with a great sound! We boarded The Locust then, and with the first turn of the handle the four-cylindere engine hummed, and we began the first day of motor-travel and adventure, George sitting by me, and William in great state in the body with the extra tyres and luggage and camping outfit. Behind, in the luggage-carrier, were our two small trunks, and hanging below them a canvas water-bag. So no doubt we looked the travellers we hoped to be—at any rate the whole village seemed to have turned out to see us start!

In a few minutes we had left the straggling



Sharks' Bay.



"The punt was large enough to hold the Locust and a baker's cart."

main street behind us, and had reached the ferry-crossing of the Terranora. The punt was large enough to hold The Locust and a baker's cart, and was guided across from bank to bank by steel hawsers, which, moving in the grooves of revolving wheels, are worked by a hand-turned wheel. As The Locust slowly and carefully descended the slope leading to the punt, George noticed a large dead snake lying by the roadside, and asked the ferryman, as hale an old man of over 60 as one could wish to see, if he had killed it.

"No," he answered, "my sixteenth son killed him!"

"Sixteenth!" said George, "how many have you, then?"

"Eighteen," answered the ferryman.

"Any daughters?" asked George.

"Only eight of them," replied the proud father (and "Two to one on the boys," murmured William, who was helping to turn the handle).

"You really have twenty-seven children, then?" asked George.

"Aye," said the old warrior, "and all living. Why, I gave a little party the other day to fifty of my family and their families who live here-about, and you wouldn't believe what the bill for tucker came to, soft drinks and that!"

Thus we reached the further bank, listening to the happy, garrulous great-grandfather, as he told us of the precocity of the youngest of his descendants. Then along the curving road, with fields of bright green sugar-cane upon our right, and on our left, with scrub between, the ocean, the track being a rich red. Several of the curves of the road were very abrupt, and we had rounded one of these at a comfortable speed, when, in spite of my throwing out the clutch and putting the brake hard on, we ran into a car which had evidently stopped on the road for repairs. The Locust was not damaged except that her offside mudguard was a bit doubled up, but I opened my mouth to say things to the chauffeur for pulling up on the wrong side of the road, and shut it again without speaking; for I saw that two ladies were sitting at the roadside, drinking tea from a large shining Thermos flask, and I stayed my anger. Sitting up, too, alert and watchful, by the side of one of the ladies was a very likely-looking wire-haired fox terrier, and the owner's "Lie down, Boppo!" told us that she at least regarded him as a protection.

I wish I could convey to you the impression that this sight made upon me—two motor-cars, one of which was quite modern, two girls, dressed



My sixteenth son.



Thickly covered Island.

simply but well, and a well-bred dog, sitting with their backs to the great trees of the untouched primeval Australian scrub, great gaunt swaying trees, and dense impenetrable shrub and creeper!

We got down to investigate the nature of The Locust's injuries, George murmuring, "A dream of Fair Women!"; but William had already joined his brother chauffeur, and was figuring out the damage, which amounted to a burst tyre plus an unobliging coil. For William is never so happy as when, with spanner in one hand and oil-can in the other, and plenty of black grease on both, he is reconstructing the injured parts of a car's interior. George and I had backed The Locust a couple of yards and were straightening out the bent mudguard when I heard a voice behind me saying, "How do you do, Dr Perry?" and, as I turned, surprised, "D-do you remember me? I'm——"

"Bless my soul!" I interrupted, raising my cap, "why, if it isn't little Miss Muffet!"

The young woman drew herself up to about five feet two inches and said, with dignity.

"I'm M-miss Sutton now, if you please!"

"I beg your pardon," I said, smiling, "of course, if I remember rightly, Miss Muffet had her hair in a pigtail?"

"That's *ages* ago!" she retorted, (you will remember, Amy, that I met the family of Suttons at Manly two years ago, after my last motor-trip, and became friendly with them, Miss Muffet being the eldest of the children)——

"That's ages ago! but will you let me introduce you to Auntie, she's not my aunt, you know," (how could I know?) "b-but I call her Auntie."

I was duly introduced to "Miss Durston" and to "Boppo," who, like any dog worth possessing, desired further acquaintance before coming to a decision as to one's suitableness or otherwise as a friend to his mistress; and George having been put through a similar ceremony.

"Now we all know each other," said Miss Muffet, and we can abuse you for running into our car!"

"Oh, I like that!" I retorted, "why——" and then I stopped, for I was conscious that the most beautiful brown eyes in the world were regarding me with whimsical humour; so I finished my sentence by saying that I was very sorry, or words to that effect—I don't know what I said . . . George stood by me, looking, as I thought very conscious of his two days-old beard, which, as I think I told you, he is determined to let grow on this trip. We shall see.

We now moved together towards the ladies' car, which, of course, was the one we had seen at Tweed Heads earlier in the day, and bending over William, I asked him how long the repairs would take.

"I can make it take an hour," he replied with the utmost gravity, but so that I alone heard.

"That should do nicely," I answered.

"Please don't bother about us," said Miss Durston to me, "we can manage quite well; John will be able to fix her—if you give him time," she added, smiling.

"Not at all," I muttered, but I don't quite know what I meant, for I was wrestling with my inspiration. But Miss Muffet's voice interrupted us:

"Is this your car, Dr Perry? a Humber isn't it? she's a useful-looking sort! How m-many will she hold?"

I believe that she asked a number of other questions, but I was making up my mind and didn't hear.

"Yes," I said subconsciously, "let me introduce you to 'The Locust.'"

"Locust! Locust?" said Miss Muffet, "how sweet! but why?"

"Because, as Mr Lidney says, she eats up the miles with a great sound."

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"How c-clever of you, Mr Lidney; I wish you'd name ours, will you?"

"He has already done so," I chipped in, "for as we—as we *reached* you, he murmured something about a dream of——"

"Shut up!" said George, succinctly.

"What did you mean, Mr Lidney?" asked Miss Muffet.

"Oh, nothing!" said George, in confusion.

"But you will name our car, won't you? please!" said Miss Muffet, and I recognised her coaxing manner.

"I thought Ladybird would be——"

"Oh, Auntie! how divvie!" cried Miss Muffet, "Mr Lidney has named our Melnote 'The Ladybird,' really Mr Lidney, you *are* good at christening cars."

George went on blushing and didn't stop or even answer when Miss Durston asked "why?" From the look that passed between the ladies it seemed that "why" involved some joke.

Then I took my courage in both hands and addressing Miss Durston said:

"May we offer you a lift for a few miles, until your car overtakes us?" and out of the tail of my eye I saw William unobtrusively emptying the body of The Locust of luggage. I turned my

back upon him. It was Miss Muffet who answered me!

"Oh, yes, Auntie! do let's—I've, I've known Dr Perry for ages!"

"Thank you very much, Dr Perry," said Miss Durston, "but won't it——?"

"Not at all!" I interrupted, jubilantly, "it would be delightful if you would join us to Murwillumbah:—I suppose you are going on?" I added.

"Yes, to Sydney," said Miss Durston.

"May we then——?"

"Thank you very much, we will accept your kind offer, until, as you say, our car——"

"The Ladybird" (from Miss Muffet).

"—Till The Ladybird overtakes us."

"Or until we reach Murwillumbah?" I amended.

"Yes, thank you!" replied Miss Durston. While I thought, "I jolly well see it overtaking us until we stop," but I didn't say so.

As I walked towards The Locust, I heard Miss Muffet say. "Oh, how dear of you, Auntie, to say yes; where shall we sit? you sit in front with——"

"Hush, child! it isn't our car," came in a whispered reply from the older of the two girls, for they were nothing else.

So I opened the side door, no one expressed surprise at the disappearance of the luggage, and they seated themselves. Telling William that we would expect The Ladybird to overtake us at Murwillumbah, ("Yes, sir"), I took the wheel and with George once more at my side we proceeded on the road, feeling extraordinarily elated for some reason or other. George muttered something about "Nothing wanting is, but she alas!" but was otherwise silent, as was I; but Miss Muffet chattered away incessantly, now and then addressing a question beginning with "why" to George or to me.

Across the quarter-mile-wide Tweed river by ferry to the hamlet of Chindera, and along an even road with rich-looking cultivation of cane and corn (maize) on our left, and on our right the wide-glistening river with an occasional thickly covered island, and on its further side the cane grown mountain slopes, and in our faces a delightfully cool breeze, exhilarating and fresh. Past Tumbulgem and Condong, sugar plantations, across the Tweed again by bridge to Murwillumbah, an important township which, to-day, was adorned with flags in honour of the expected arrival of Lord Chelmsford, Governor of N. S. Wales, lately Governor of Queensland.



Murwillumbah.



From Tweedheads by Steamer.

Murwillumbah may also be reached from Tweed Heads by small passenger and freight (chiefly cream) steamers which ply to and fro daily. The trip by river is charmingly beautiful, but I have described it to you in a former letter.

As we were having lunch, we heard a car drive up to the hotel, and going out, I found The Ladybird drawn up behind The Locust. Sending John in to find something to eat, I detained William and asked him if The Ladybird was a good car.

"Yes, sir!" he said enthusiastically, "I should think about as good as they make 'em, sir."

"Fast?" I inquired.

"Speedometer registered 48 along the flat, sir."

"John's a good driver, then?"

"Oh, I was driving, sir!" said William.

"Is she in good order now?" I asked.

"Couldn't be better, sir!" William replied.

"Magneto all right?"

"She started up on the magneto after the last ferry, sir."

"Accumulators—coil?"

"As good as new, sir, only John's a bit of a meddler—he'd been trying to improve the coil at Tweed Heads."

"No chance of another break-down, then?" I asked.

"Barring accidents, sir, none at all!"

"Not even if you are driving her this afternoon, William?" and I am afraid that I reddened.

"Well, sir, of course . . . the coil . . ." and he stopped.

"I shall not be surprised," I said, "if we find you stuck up about two miles out from here."

"Quite so, sir."

"Then go and get your dinner," I said, "and eat as quickly as you can. Don't let John finish first." And I returned to our party, knowing that I could depend upon him. As I entered the room I caught Miss Muffet's voice asking George "Why?" but George's reply was a laugh only. ("Take care! George old boy," I thought.)

Boppo was being fed by his mistress from a fork, and looking at them I said:

"Why, Boppo?"

"It is a funny name," said Miss Durston, smiling, "it was given him when he was a pup, his former owner told me; he was very sorry to part with him, but he was going to England, and could not take the dog with him; so he sold him."

"But why not have given him——?"

"Oh, he said that he felt that whoever bought him would value him more than if he had been given."

"Wise man," I said, "but the name? I beg your pardon for interrupting you."

"Not at all!" said Miss Durston, and Miss Muffet laughed. Why?

"He was brought up by hand——"

"I wanted to call him 'Pip'!" said Miss Muffet.

"And," continued Miss Durston, "the baby of the owner's family always called his bottle 'Boppo' so they called Boppo Boppo! and though Miss Muffet's suggestion was a nice one, I didn't like to change his name." Boppo of course, knew that he was being talked about, and wagged his stump vigorously at each repetition of his name.

As Miss Durston finished her explanation John entered and announced that The Ladybird was ready, (the chauffeurs had assimilated the names very readily) and Miss Durston agreeing with thanks to my suggestion that William should accompany and drive them for a few miles—"Perhaps you will let us overtake you at the buffer-country," I had suggested—while I felt like a Machiavellian conspirator, we handed the

ladies into The Ladybird and bid them "Good-bye for the present."

We overtook them about three miles out, (I was beginning to get anxious), at a point where we most nearly approached Mount Warning, and George said, "Ah!"

"Coils all adrift, sir," said William with the utmost gravity, and "Tut-tut," said I, feeling Miss Durston's eye upon me.

"How is the magneto?"

"Pretty fair, sir, but misses a good deal now and then—doesn't like the neighbourhood of mountains, seemingly, sir." (What did he mean?) and all I could think of saying was "Tut-tut," while Miss Muffet said:

"It is f-funny, isn't it?"

"Why?" I said, for I was feeling hot.

"Oh, because!" she said laughing. However, I had to see it through, so I asked Miss Durston if she would permit the arrangement of the morning to be resumed.

"I'm afraid there's nothing else for it," she said, "but I am ashamed to trouble you so much."

"Not at all!" I said, and Miss Muffet laughed, and coming close to me she whispered, "I think you are as clever at accidents as Mr Lidney is



Near Murwillumbah.



"Where we most nearly approached Mt. Warning."

at names. But isn't William dear, with his mountain neighbourhood?" Of course, they both saw through my little device, but Miss Durston was gracious enough to pretend not to. We stowed the paraphernalia in The Ladybird again and gave the chauffeurs some of our provisions and one of the Thermos flasks, ("In c-case you have to stay here all night," said Miss Muffet), and for the second time The Locust carried four passengers and a dog. . . . But I must get some sleep, so good night, old girl—I wonder from where the next letter will be written?

Your affectionate brother,

Aston.

CHAPTER IV

Lismore, *Nov. 24th*, 1909

My dear Amy,

We haven't come far to-day, for Miss Durston has some friends in the town whom she wishes to see, so George and I have decided to stop here, too . . . where was I? Oh, yes! I remember; The Locust had her complement of passengers again—two men, two girls and a dog. (By the way, Boppo and I are quite friendly now, but no one can coax him from Miss Durston's side.) I shall begin this letter by trying to describe the two girls.

Let me begin with the easier one. Miss Muffet is nineteen, a blue-eyed mischievous, plump imp with an occasional stammer in her talk which is a curiously fetching defect; she wears a tricky feminine cricketing hat perched on her rebellious brown hair, the kind of soft hair that looks always as though it had just been

washed, and from which combs of various shapes are constantly falling; one of those jolly things that cannot sit still, but are always looking for pleasure, finding it, and passing it on. Can you see her? the product of an Australian city and a comfortable home; the kind who flirt outrageously but innocently, who resent and never forgive the slightest familiarity; who finally marry the unexpected man and settle down into domestic life with an extraordinary facility and become the best wives and mothers in the world. There you are, Amy, that's Miss Muffet! and there are hundreds of them bred in the free air of this glorious Australia!

Miss Durston I find less easy to describe, albeit she is a type of our bush-born girl. She is built on smaller and finer, yet strong lines—*petite* describes her as well as any word, I know. She wears a motor sun-bonnet which frames her little features picturesquely; large brown eyes like a fawn's, with long lashes, a straight nose with delicate sensitive nostrils, bronze hair which she wears in a great mass of coils on the top of her head, a white skin prettily burned by the sun, dimples in her cheek and chin, the sweetest little mouth that ever cried to be kissed! perfect teeth unspoiled with gold, small hands and feet;

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and is perhaps twenty-four. Her Christian name, I think, is Ida; Miss Muffet whose baptismal name is Elsie, calls her Id when she doesn't call her Auntie. . . . That's as near as I can get in words, but she is very beautiful. . . . But I must get on . . .

The Locust passed on its way, coming soon to an awkward creek-crossing at a sudden bend in the road, where we narrowly escaped the disaster of being stuck up. Here we entered the tick-buffer territory, thirteen miles wide, before entering or leaving which all cattle coming from the north must be dipped and all horses sprayed with a fluid fatal to the pest.

The drive now became grand and even terrifying, (so George said afterwards), for it ran along cuttings made in the mountain side of Bob's Lookout range, narrow tracks with sudden curves, the precipice side being sometimes protected by a fence, but generally quite open and horribly inviting—great gorges with here and there a patch of cultivation on the steep hill-sides, but mostly clothed in wild Australian gum bush—where any hitch in the steering gear or a burst front tyre might take one over the edge of a deep ravine to fear and pain and nothingness . . . I have never before felt any nervous-

ness or even uneasiness in driving, but yesterday I grew hot with anxiety as I guided The Locust around those dangerous bends. But though the experience of such a road is much more disquieting for those sitting behind, where one sees less and imagines more, Miss Durston made no suggestion of nervousness, and Miss Muffet, who told me after it was all over that she was "terrified nearly to death," only showed her alarm by an occasional smothered exclamation, and when we arrived at the bottom of the descent exclaimed, "Oh! wasn't that too beautiful for words!"

"I couldn't see the beauty for your tongue," I said, for she had chattered faster than usual, "do you by any chance talk in your sleep?"

"Oh, you rude man, you—but I'll pay you out!" she cried.

"Why?" I asked—and for once she was silent.

At a level crossing of the railway we saw Lord Chelmsford's special train approaching, on its way to Murwillumbah and its flags; we waved our loyal greetings, but though we saw him, he did not see us.

"Nasty man!" said Miss Muffet.

"If he had known you were here, he would

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doubtless have stopped the train and let you——”

“ Kiss his hand? ” interrupted the girl.

“ I dare say,” I answered, taken by surprise.

“ I think it’s such a sweet old custom,” she said. “ I should love to kiss hands! ”

“ Try mine? ” I suggested “ or——”

“ Be quiet! ” she exclaimed, “ I mean a king or queen or governor.”

“ I beg your pardon! ” I replied.

“ Not at all! ” said Miss Muffet.

Childish? Yes, it was; but the sweet air of heaven was in my lungs and I felt young and very foolish!

Nearing Byron Bay we ran parallel with a long line of bush fire, which looked in the gathering darkness like a great smouldering pink cloud edged with long jagged lightning flame. For, as a result of my slow driving on the ranges we did not reach Byron Bay till eight o’clock. We dined together, and had a merry though rather meagre meal; the town was full in honour of the Governor, and we, coming late, had to take the leavings.

I must not forget to tell you that when Miss Durston was stepping from the car, a button, fixed with an inefficient clip, fell from her blouse

to the ground. I picked it up, and this morning it adorned and still adorns the lapel of my coat. It is one of those largish ornamental buttons that ladies are wearing just now.

The Ladybird reached Byron Bay a few minutes after us, and I can imagine the chafing of William at our slow rate of progress; so having arranged to confer with Miss Durston in the morning about to-day's plans, George and I went for a stroll on the grand beach, the sand of which is so firm that at low tide it is used by bicyclists, horsemen and buggy drivers as a road; indeed they journey by the sands to Southport in Queensland, having here and there to go inland where a point of land projects into the sea; and on to the jetty where we saw the chair and cage in which passengers are hoisted into the boats which run between Byron Bay and Sydney. The bright half-moon was flooding the sea with its beautiful soft light, while the Byron Bay lighthouse gleamed out its warning to mariners.

Having found our room at our hotel, which was only a few yards from that in which the ladies were staying, I opened up upon the subject which was on my mind, and which I know is worrying you, Amy dear, for the conventions are more present in your English minds than in ours.

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Our conversation was something like this: (imagine us sitting on our beds, facing each other):

I.—"Look here, George, I want your advice!"

George.—"Fire away, old man!"

I.—"Well, you know, to-day's experience has been very delightful and all that—I can speak for both of us?"

George.—"Yes."

I.—"Good! well, it was all right and plain sailing to help two girls when their car had broken down; we could do nothing less, could we?"

George.—"No."

I.—"Then the question now is—what about to-morrow?"

George.—"What about it?"

I.—"I say, old chap, you're not helping me much, are you? and you're in with me in this, you know!"

George.—"Deep."

I.—"Right O! Then, when we meet at their hotel, to-morrow, are we to say good-bye and never see them again, or——"

George.—"We might overtake them."

I.—"The Ladybird can do 45, at a pinch 50, and our best is 35."



Byron Bay Lighthouse.



George . . . Lismore.

George.—"We overtook them twice to-day."

I.—"We cannot depend upon accidents; besides we should have William with us to-morrow."

George.—"I see—and John?"

I.—"Oh, I can't tamper with their own chauffeur, and besides he would certainly bungle it."

George.—"Why not send William with them again?"

I.—"Too thin! I felt fool enough to-day when he talked about the neighbourhood of mountains affecting the magneto."

George.—"It *was* a little far-fetched."

We now seemed to have reached an impasse, and we smoked stolidly for some minutes. Then I said what I might have said at the start, if I had not wanted the suggestion to come from George. "I don't see," I said, "what there really is to prevent us from inviting them to travel with us as they did to-day, seeing that I have known Miss Muffet for some years."

George.—"Yes, why not?"

I.—"Well, Miss Durston is in charge of Miss Muffet. It is her car, and if she acts according to the conventions——"

George.—“ We may never see them again.”

I.—“ Until we get to Sydney ; you see there is nothing to prevent them from reaching Coff’s harbour to-morrow, and we can’t expect to get further than Grafton.”

George.—“ We might travel by night, there’s a good moon.”

I.—“ But even so we should only have the empty satisfaction of seeing them drive away next morning.”

George.—“ Empty satisfaction—that’s good ! Bother the *convenances* ! ”

“ With all my heart,” I agreed, “ but there they are, and the whole question is, will Miss Durston bow to them or not ? ”

George fidgeted in his bed—he had turned in —“ It’s worth trying, anyhow,” said he.

“ Yes, it’s worth trying,” I said slowly, “ and I’ll try it ! ”

“ Good man ! ” said George, and I thought he had gone to sleep. After a short interval of silence I spoke again, “ You might tackle Miss Muffet,” I said.

“ I have,” answered George, rather sleepily.

“ You have ? ” I said, in surprise.

“ Yes,” said he, “ she’s on our side.”

“ That’s something,” I muttered.

"A good deal," said George, rousing himself for a moment and then settling down again; and I wondered when he had found an opportunity . . . Then I wrote my letter to you, Amy, and then—I lay awake staring at the top of my mosquito net, for hours as it seemed, and fell asleep as the dawnlight was beginning to show. . . . I over-slept myself in consequence, and was very much annoyed to learn that it was six o'clock when George woke me. He had been up more than an hour, and had met Miss Muffet on the beach, she having told him yesterday, during the opportunity, that she loved getting up early. (Oh! Miss Muffet my memory of Manly tells me another story!) George had suggested again that we should all travel together.

"What did she say?" I asked.

"She clasped her hands in that—in that pretty way she has," he answered, "and said that it would be 'perfectly lovely,' that she and Auntie were getting so tired of each other and of the view of John's back. Moreover, she said that she had asked Auntie already."

"What did Miss Durston say?"

"Nothing," said George, "she just laughed and patted Miss M—Sutton's shoulder."

"Come along, old man, and help me face the music," I said.

We had arranged to have breakfast together at seven o'clock, and it was being served to the two ladies as we entered. After the usual greetings, which are memorable to me because it was the first time that I had shaken hands with Miss Durston, such a little hand!—I opened fire, feeling foolishly tongue-tied and nervous.

"Do you intend going far to-day, Miss Durston?" I asked.

"To Lismore only," she answered, "I have a friend there whom I have promised to look up." (This rather took the wind out of my sails—do you notice my mixed metaphors?), but I went on—"We shall pass through Lismore, of course."

"Then we may meet again there?" she replied.

"Y-yes," I stammered, "but," I blurted out, "why should we not go together? I mean may we invite you to—won't you join us in The Locust again?"

"Who's st-stammering now?" whispered Miss Muffet.

"I'm afraid that would hardly do, would it?" she answered, but there was a curious lack of discouragement in her tone.

"Why not?" I said eagerly, "what difference can the addition of Lidney and me make?"

"T-two," said Miss Muffet, and I wanted to smack her.

"Mrs Grundy would call it all the difference," said Miss Durston, ignoring Miss Muffet's frivolous interruption.

"Mrs Grundy lives only in cities," I said, feebly.

"She lives everywhere," said Miss Durston.

"Oh, but——" I said, and I could think of nothing else.

"She rules the world," went on Miss Durston.

"Tyrannically," I answered.

"But to the satisfaction of the gossips," she replied.

"Oh, Id!" interrupted Miss Muffet, "I n-never heard you stick up for Mrs Grundy before! . . . Oh! what have I said?" For a painful blush overspread Miss Durston's face at her words, and she half rose. George and I were silent, though Heaven knows! I wanted to say something, but I had no words ready, and when Miss Durston, after hesitating for a moment or two, rose and went quickly from the room, we stood speechless. Miss Muffet followed her, and we just stood and waited.

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In a few minutes Miss Muffet came back with a look of unaccustomed seriousness on her face.

"Oh, Dr Perry!" she said, "Auntie says she will—in fact she told me she would, last night—if you asked us, but she's been crying so!" and the child's eyes filled.

"Crying!" I said, distressed, "what did I say to——"

"It was *me*," interrupted Miss Muffet, "but I don't know why. We have often spoken about Mrs Grundy before—but you will be gentle with her, won't you?"

"Gentle?" I cried, and turned away to hide the tears which sprang to my silly eyes. . . . Gentle? when I would die for her, live for her, lose and try to win the world for her! . . .

"Run away and comfort her," I said, after a while, "and bustle about so as to change her thoughts; and get ready quickly!" I added.

It was a quarter of an hour before they appeared, but I had fixed things up in the meantime and had given William his instructions. As Miss Durston was getting into The Locust she raised her beautiful eyes to mine, and I thought that they held a grateful look, but why

I cannot think, and then for a moment they fastened on my button, and her hand went instinctively to the place on her blouse where a gold safety pin had taken the button's place, but she said nothing . . . and as for me I had nothing to say. Yet I had to make peace with myself before we started, so just before I took my place at the wheel, I said.

"Miss Durston will you forgive me for my trick of yesterday?"

"What trick?" she asked, but she knew.

"The false magneto," I said.

"That is effected by the neighbourhood of mountains?"

"Yes," I said, smiling.

"Not at all!" she answered, and for a moment she touched my hand, which I had placed on the door. And my heart's beat was accelerated as I took my seat. . . .

The journey from Byron Bay through Bangalow to Lismore was uneventful. The first three miles or so took us up through cuttings in the mountain side similar to those through which we had passed the day before, and for a great part of the way we seemed to be running along a high ridge with magnificent dairy farm land in the undulating valleys on either hand,

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with here and there a patch of maize cultivation.

The soil is rich red brown, with stone, of which latter many of the settlers have built low fences. I was very strongly impressed with the well-to-do look of this part of the country. So very different from the gum-timbered country through which one is accustomed to drive on the coast near Brisbane. I drove more slowly than usual, and looking back, caught sight once or twice of The Ladybird, which William was finding hard to keep behind us. We stopped on the road at ten o'clock and drank billy-tea, the nicest of all kinds, just as the tea made on our Thames camping-out holidays was always more delicious than any other.

An adventure occurred as we were packing up again. Miss Muffet was stepping from a fallen tree when George saw a snake lying where her foot would have fallen. There was no time to warn her, so he gave her a push that might have sent her sprawling, but had the ludicrous effect of making her run a dozen stumbling yards; when she was able to pull herself up she turned with flushed face to expostulate, in time to see George give the snake a blow with a handy-lying sapling which settled it for ever. It was a

death adder, a venomous reptile whose bite is almost certain death; it is often called the "deaf adder" on account of the sluggishness of its get-away suggesting that it cannot hear. George was full of apologies for his rough treatment of Miss Muffet, but he need not have expressed any regret, for Miss Muffet regarded him as a hero. . . . Good old George! it was a plucky thing to do, and he had acted with great presence of mind. I myself have so great a repugnance for snakes that, in similar circumstances, I am afraid I should have—well, acted differently.

We saw another snake, marked in concentric rings of white and black, with which I am not familiar, we also saw several iguanas, scuttling out of our way and running up the hidden side of the nearest tree; and even a stray wallaby or two—all of which added to the interest of the morning's drive.

We reached Lismore in good time for lunch, and when we had seen Miss Durston to her friend's house, we three returned to the hotel. I snapped George in earnest conversation with a local inhabitant outside our hotel, and also took a picture of a very pretty peep of the Richmond river with willow trees upon its further bank.

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It was here that Miss Muffet spotted my button.

"What's the button, Dr Perry?" she asked suddenly.

"It is the badge of an Order of Servitude," I answered, for I had expected her question.

"What order?" she asked.

"The Order of the Ornamental Button," I answered.

"Why?" asked she.

"It serves to show," I said, with mock sententiousness, "that I am prepared to do all I can in the service of my Lady, come when she may, or come what may."

"B-but how about Mr Lidney?" she asked.

"He has shown his devotion already," I answered, and the dear girl blushed. . . .

When I had spent some time writing I went to the verandah and found Miss Muffet and George sitting on deck chairs, looking very cosy and friendly.

"Oh, Dr Perry! I have been making Mr Lidney talk," cried Miss Muffet, "and do you know he can talk quite nicely if he tries!" (Poor George!)

"Has he told you that he can also——?"

"Shut up, Aston!" interrupted George,



Richmond River . . . Willow trees.



Grafton Main Street.

blushing like a furnace—"I beg your pardon, Miss Sutton."

"That he can also——?" asked Miss Muffet, ignoring George's attempt to gag me.

"That he can also write," I finished.

"Write?" said Miss Muffet, with wide eyes; and in a kind of whisper she added, "D-do you mean B-books?" (Books with a big capital, please, Amy.)

"Poems," I said.

"Not really?" she cried, "you're not pulling my—you're not joking are you?"

"I don't think so," I answered, "look here!" and drawing my copy of "Songs and Sonnets" from my pocket I handed it to her. She took the book from me silently, handling it as though it were some precious relic—nor was her display of admiration and wonder affected, for she is ingenuousness itself.

"Will you take great care of it," I asked unnecessarily, "and let me have it again some time? for I value it very highly," I went on, putting my hand on George's shoulder and squeezing it so that he winced. I have a large hand!

"Oh, yes, indeed! thanks, thanks so much for telling me!" she said, "I don't believe he ever would have! . . ."

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So I left them together, wondering whether the snake incident or this would impress her the more. . . . I am feeling lonely, somehow, to-day, and not inclined to write, so good-bye, dear Amy.

I am, your loving brother,

Aston.

CHAPTER V

Grafton, *Nov 25th*, 1909

My dear Amy,

We left Lismore early this morning, and The Locust and The Ladybird looked very well standing ready for us outside the hotel. I said nothing, purposely, about the arrangements for to-day, taking them for granted, and if there had been anyone to see us start off I am sure that they would not have seen any irregularity in our action. Once more William started the engines—they hummed their approval and off we started. . . .

We crossed the Richmond and on to Córakí, where we noticed that the flags were flying half-mast high—for whom we did not inquire. The country so far had been flat and uninteresting, an abundance of Scotch thistle serving to give a look of wildness to the land, for the Scotch thistle is a “noxious weed” in Australia. We crossed

the Richmond at Córakí by steam ferry, and again at Woodburn, a few miles further on. We had been very subdued and quiet up till now; I don't know why; but by this our spirits were rising, and lunch by the roadside was a delightful meal.

On we went, along sandy roads between gum-forests to the beautiful Clarence river which was crossed by hand-worked ferry, on to Chatsworth island and across it for five glorious speedy miles to the steam ferry at Harwood, and from there to Grafton with the great river on our right, the sun brightening its broad surface, on our left green cane fields with here and there a large paddock of exceptionally fine corn. The view of the river with the mountains behind was very beautiful. My eyes were gladdened here with the sight of the exquisite jacarandah tree in full bloom, a sight so prettily familiar to a dweller in Brisbane. . . . Across the river again by hand-ferry, the punt rocking quite sea-sickly in the fury of a wind squall—and so on to Grafton, William so artfully timing the movements of the speedier Ladybird that we were never on the same punt together, though we always saw him waiting when we had reached the further shore.

Miss Durston seemed tired, though she admitted having slept better than on the previous

night at Byron Bay, where she and Miss Muffet had been kept awake by the noise of drunken revellers; so we decided to stay here until to-morrow. I wished this, too, because The Locust had shown signs of wanting a tune up, though no one else appeared to have noticed this. We settled the ladies at a delightful hotel on the bank of the Richmond, and dined together sumptuously and blithely. After dinner we strolled down to the near-by ferry and crossed to the southern side, but did not land, coming back at once, enjoying the small trip exceedingly. I was surprised to learn that no charge was made for the little journey, which no doubt accounted for the number of people who, like ourselves, appeared to be on the boat merely for the pleasure of the short excursion. . . . And when we said "Good night" before going off to our hotel, which was a short distance away, I felt that the quiet uneventful day had helped considerably to deepen our acquaintance with the two girls . . . George, I know, has chosen . . . and I?

"I long to touch her hair so golden red
 As larks may kiss the tresses of the sun. . . ."
 "She is one of the choir of the daughters of fire,
 And the touch of her hand is a token of truth;

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Her presence is sweet, from her head to her feet,
With the fervour of love and the joyance of youth
And the sense of a trust
That outliveth the dust! ” *

I have to borrow words, from memory, to try and describe her—my own are impotent. The touch of her hands sends sparks through me—I who have danced with hundreds of pretty girls and never experienced a thrill, so that I have thought myself immune! She cannot be more than twenty-four, but she has seen trouble, and, I should think, recently; for when in repose her face often shows lines of care which should not be there, and which I would give the rest of my life to help remove . . . I know you will not laugh at me . . . for, Amy, I love her with all my heart. I have learnt that her name is Enid; don't you think “ Id ” pretty . . . Id! . . .

November 26th—The Locust not being ready, and we not being in a hurry—George and I at least wish to prolong these hours of companionship—and Brisbane and my practice, left in good hands, seeming too far away to bother about, we have decided to wait here until after the heat of the day; to have a rest where none of us are tired; for Miss Durston was quite herself

* Eric Mackay (from memory).

after ten hours' sleep, and to take our chance of seeing the Governor, who is expected here this afternoon.

We walked up the delightfully shaded main street, and made some necessary commissariat purchases, and some nice though unnecessary ones, and I took a snap of the monument to some civic happening. We noticed that the four clocks of this tower all recorded different times and none of them right! As one of us remarked upon this, an elderly townsman, with the face of the habitual-grievance-man, passed us and said, "I see that you noticed the clocks! they started to go wrong before they had been up a fortnight and have never gone properly since—waste of money I call it!" and with a grin of satisfaction at having said something disagreeable, disappeared into his saddler's shop.

"Why are cobblers and saddlers always so discontented?" asked Miss Muffet.

"Is it a riddle?" I said.

"No," she answered, "but why?"

"The smell of leather is very disagreeable," I said, "and perhaps it gives them pains, just as the discontent of Ireland is said to be produced by indigestion caused through eating potatoes!"

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"I've heard that before, Dr Perry, but if you will promise, I'll ask you a riddle I made myself."

"Promise what?"

"That you won't t-tell—anyone."

"I'll promise nothing," I said.

"But I would like to ask you this riddle," she coaxed.

"I won't tell Mr Lidney, then!"

"Promise?"

"Honest injun, etcetera," I said.

"All right! What is the difference between Eve and the modern woman?"

"Give it up," I said promptly.

"And you promise not to tell——?"

"Mr Lidney, yes!"

"Because Eve gave Adam the apple, but the modern woman gives her husband the pip!"

"Oh, you bad girl!" I said, "I'll tell your mother as soon as ever I see her."

"She knows it already," she answered, and she made a grimace at me.

So in simple banter we passed the morning. Having an hour or two to put in before lunch, we chartered a small motor-launch and went for a run up-river, an experience which would have been more pleasant if the engines had been less noisy. Boppo positively disliked the run! . . .

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Great oysters for lunch, and then a quiet spell on the balcony with the strong scent of the magnolia flower to help us to fall asleep . . . I must post this here, so good-bye, Amy dear . . . I wonder what will happen before I post again?

Your loving brother,

Aston.

CHAPTER VI

Coramba, *Nov. 26th*, 1909

My dear Amy,

The Governor, Lord Chelmsford, arrived very quietly—he is most unostentatious—at Grayton at about three o'clock, and was welcomed in the usual fashion by crowds of children and old people, and a sprinkling of others, a most unbandlike-looking band playing "God save the King!" I took a snap of the mayoral welcome, and I hope that the little girl comes out well who was craning her neck in a most precarious position in order to see his Excellency at close quarters. . . . It was four o'clock before we left, crossing the Clarence river by steam ferry and along good bush roads. A punctured tyre caused some delay, so that sundown overtook us and the waxing moon lightened our way, a very beautiful run between



Grafton Mayor welcomes the Governor.



Bush Road.



mountains. Here, in the distance ahead we had a weird view of a great bush fire, through which we presently passed, but by the time we reached it we had no thought other than for the flying ants which met us in thousands, causing amusement at first and then annoyance. They were coming from the fire, and seemed to be in a hurry, and as we were going at a fair bat, too, their impact against our faces stung; but that was not the worse, for they crawled into our ears and nostrils and down our necks, so that in a minute or two we were all scratching vigorously wherever we could reach. Miss Muffet was nearly choked, for as she cried, "Oh!" one flew down her throat, "the wrong way," and was coughed and spluttered out with great commotion. A horseman whom we overtook upon the road is probably dead as I write, unless he shut his mouth after the first few ants had found shelter therein, for it was very wide open as we passed him. After the ants, we saw, looking very pretty as we whizzed past them, a number of flitting fireflies glistening in the bush. We had our acetylene head light burning now, so I was able to push The Locust along, and with hood down and the cool breeze in our faces, we were very content.

We reached Coramba, a little township nestling in the mountains, at half-past seven, and were made welcome by the comely hostess and her handmaidens. There is only one hotel here, but it is built in two parts, so that we have been able, to some extent, to continue the arrangement of occupying different buildings at night. . . . I am growing younger every day, and if the process continues, I shall be a baby in a week, as in Eden Phillpott's nightmare story. The meal here was notable for the excellence of its corned beef, and our appetite supplying the sauce, we all left clean plates, and some of us were not ungrateful for the following eggs . . . While smoking our after-dinner pipes, strolling up and down the moonlit village street, George and I were accosted by an ancient inhabitant who asked if he might see our car. We showed him *The Locust* and *The Ladybird*, and as he seemed unusually impressed, I asked him if he had not seen one before. "Yes," he said, "I see one six months ago—in June it were, and my word! it were fast right enough!"

"This can do 35 miles an hour and the other can do 50," I said, for no one likes his car to be thought slow.

"Yes, I dessay," said the ancient, though I don't think he believed me, "and I reckon this yere one could do a hundred; he went by yere like a flash o' lightning and was out o' sight afore the dust had risen that a raised!" . . . not too bad? as we say in Australia . . .

It had been a hot day with lowering thunder clouds, and my bedroom was like an oven; and the youth of the township had gathered upon the verandah and were discussing with much interest the arrangements for some Christmas entertainment, keeping me awake. . . . And I think that the incident, extraneous to those of our trip itself, that has made most impression upon me, occurred then. One of the young men asked the only girl of the company if she could lend him a book to read, and she went into the house and presently returned with two or three—of course I saw none of this, but I could hear—and the youth proceeded to read their titles and ask questions about them, saying as he took the last of them from her: "I say, you blokes, she wants me to read one of Dickens's works!" and his words were followed by a loud and unanimous shout of derisive laughter, in which the girl joined. . . . It will be long before I cease feeling sorry for them. . . . By the time that they had

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gone noisily away I was wide awake, with no hope of sleep for hours, so I lit my pipe and sat on the balcony, revolving many things in my mind! A cool breeze, coming from rain, had risen, and now it was deliciously cool out of doors. The rising wind made mournful music in the trees, and below me, a few score yards away, a noisy stream tumbled in miniature waterfalls over its rocky bed: the clouds, few at first, gathered in heavy masses on the horizon, hiding the stars, but there was enough moonlight to silver the pretty view. . . . A great draught mare walked heavily down the road, nibbling at stray bits of grass as it went, followed at some distance by its light-brown white-stockinged foal, the silence of whose unshod feet gave it a ghostly impression: a predatory dog came near me, sniffing for stray scraps, and startled by the sudden sight of my figure, barked timorously and fled: curlews cried sorrowfully in the distance, and the wind blew colder, so that I was glad to draw the rug over knees and shoulders . . . and presently I went in, and by candle-light, wrote, and am writing my daily letter to you. . . . I cannot sleep; it is two o'clock in the morning, and one thinks more clearly in the silence of the night. . . . She is sleeping in one of those rooms in "the cottage,"

I know not which—and every breath of her dear body is dearer to me than my life! I have learnt that there has been one event in her experience that affects her strongly at moments of remembrance, but what it is I cannot guess, but that it gives her pain is shown by the way she seems to shrink into herself and from me—it cannot be any fault that she has committed, but it is something the consequences of which she fears. What is it? I wish I knew!—I wish, too, that she were not richer than I, for she spends freely with no apparent knowledge of the value of money, or rather with, apparently, no experience of ever having been without it. Miss Muffet, all of whose expenses she is paying, is very full of gratitude for her generosity . . . of course, I am not a poor man, and my future is, to all intents and purposes, assured, but I would not depend upon my wife for support. . . . My wife? yes, Amy, it has come to this; none but she can ever be my wife; and dare I ask her? . . . The candle is burning low, but there will be no sleep for me to-night . . . the wind has risen to a gale and is shaking this old wooden house as though it might fall. . . . I will go to the verandah again

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and dream more dreams. . . . She has asked that we start to-morrow, to-day, before sunrise, and I must wake them. . . . Good night, Amy, my dear sister,

I am, your loving brother,
Aston.

CHAPTER VII

The Bush between Kempsey
and Port Macquarie,
Nov. 27th, 1909

My dear Amy,

Please excuse pencil—explanation will follow. I left off my last letter in the early morning at Coramba . . . I sat outside until I heard the cocks crowing away in the distance on the eastern side of the great hill which shadowed the little township; it was half-past three and the Coramba cocks were not yet awake, but as the light stole in they woke and answered the challenge of their unseen enemy; then, in ludicrous chorus, so that I smiled to hear them, the laughing jackasses raised their curiously amusing voices to greet the sun. I dressed and went to see the little stream whose prattle had soothed my thoughts during the night, and listened to the pretty twitter of the awakening birds; they sang

no song of gladness, but they were glad. . . . The early morning run is the best part of the day, and yesterday morning it was pleasantly cold, so that a rug over one's knees was grateful, and driving with the hood down had the effect of making us feel more than ever out of doors.

The gorge scenery between Coramba and Coff's harbour and for some distance beyond is very grand, alone worth coming the trip to see, the palms and tree-ferns being very fine and tropical-looking. From Coramba to Coff's harbour Miss Durston, for the first time, sat on the front seat with me, and Boppo whimpered and even howled as George and Miss Muffet tried in vain to comfort him, until he had to be taken to Miss Durston's lap, where he settled down with a contented sigh. . . . Our hands touched as we arranged the rug over the spoiled dog.

While we were preparing early breakfast at Coff's harbour, a Brisbane holiday-making acquaintance of mine came along, taking his two young boys for an early walk, and we induced him and the older of the boys to join us in the car; the little chap preferred dry land so to speak. Boppo was delighted to get a run, and after an exciting chase after nothing came panting back to Miss Durston's side. George amused us all,

and Miss Muffet especially, by his unsuccessful attempts to persuade Boppo to come and be stroked by the baby boy, who on his part seemed quite satisfied with his slice of bread and butter. . . . A glimpse of the sea, "Good-bye" to our friends, and we were off once more, coming suddenly upon the very pretty view of the Raleigh river, and a few miles further arriving at Ballinger Heads, and the Ocean again. Here we alighted for "really truly" breakfast, as Miss Muffet called it, and we had a hilarious meal, for I had a little joke to relate. George and I had been shown into a room, and having had my turn at the wash-basin and run my hands through my hair, I sat on a bed and talked routes while George attended to his toilet. But he was not listening to me! his thoughts must have been far away, or surely he would not have picked up the candlestick from the dressing-table and held it over his head that he might the better see his back hair.

"What's the candle for, George?" I had asked, and his look of absent astonishment when he saw it in his hand was very funny. Miss Muffet's defence of George was ingenious, though rude. "Well, with you t-talking, Dr Perry," she said, "it is no wonder that

Mr Lidney's mind wandered!" What did she mean? . . .

We reached Kempsey after an interesting run, Miss Muffet sitting beside me from Ballinger Heads; we had lunch there, and I a short sleep that comforted me wonderfully. I need hardly say that when the time came for George to do his hair, I handed him a candle. . . . I wish he would shave; he is looking like a sundowner, and is as obstinate as a mule.

As we drove into the town (I must not forget to tell you this) I asked an old man where the Post Office was.

"Eh?" he said.

"Can you tell me where the Post Office is?" I shouted.

"Eh?" he said again.

"Deaf, better get down!" suggested George; so I got down, and going near the old man asked my question again.

"Do you want the old Post Office or the new one," he asked, in the curious intonation of long deaf people.

"I want to post some letters and send a telegram," I shouted.

"Then it will be the old Post Office, you want," he said, "there it is: if so be you want the

new Post Office, it be going to be built there!" and he pointed to a vacant allotment near-by. I went to the old Post Office. . . . The telegram I sent from Kempsey was to Port Macquarie to secure rooms at the two hotels, as I thought there might be a scarcity of rooms there; and as The Locust was behaving most excellently well, I sent William on with John and The Ladybird—he going before us for the first time—with the same object in view. The first time that I had thought it necessary to apprise anyone of our coming, and the first time that I dispensed with the assistance of the following Ladybird. . . . I wish I had done neither. . . .

Have I told you that Miss Muffet is inordinately fond of dates? She eats them all day, and I dare say she nibbles them at night! When we were two or three miles out from Kempsey, going slowly, Miss Durston noticed that one of the reserve petrol tins was leaking; we carry them in a box on the footboard on the starboard side; and sure enough it was; at the edge near the top a small stream was spurting out. If I had had the intelligence to empty this tinful into our tank then, much might not have happened that did, but I did not do so; for partly in order to test the gallon-per-mileage of The Locust, and partly be-

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cause stops are quiet and pleasant, I have made a habit of filling the tank only in the mornings, and when it is quite empty. Miss Muffet cleverly stopped the leak with one of her sticky dates, and we went along merrily again until the hesitating action of the engine announced the need for more fuel. Laughing at my mistake in not filling up at Kempsey, I lifted out one of the spare tins from the box; it felt very light, and when I shook it no sound came; putting this down, I hurriedly tried the remaining tin, which Miss Muffet had repaired, to find that this was empty, too! The tins rubbing against each other had produced holes at two opposing bottom corners—and we had left the contents of the two tins upon the road. . . . Here was a pretty pickle! The accident appeared amusing at first, but presently its significance dawned upon the others (I had seen it from the first, naturally), ten miles from anywhere—no fuel—The Ladybird at Port Macquarie by now—cut off from all communication with civilisation! You may think it strange, perhaps, that we did not, at once, start to walk on to Port Macquarie? But the Australian girl can do everything but walk, and it never occurred to them to suggest it! We coo-eed in turn and together in the hope of being

heard by some possible resident near the roadside, but our cries met with no response ; and it is a desolate thing to coo-ee into the gum-forest ! Miss Durston broke a silence which was becoming embarrassing by saying : " Let's have some tea ! " and I was glad enough of the diversion. Fortunately we carried enough provisions for a good meal, and this we ate with appetites unimpaired by the awkwardness of our situation. A motor-car passed while we were eating, but its occupants regarded our frantic handkerchief-wavings, not as an appeal for help, but as signs of good fellowship, and they whisked by at a great rate, smiling and waving, too. . . . The sun was going down, and nothing had suggested itself to me, when again we heard the hum of a motor-car, this time from the opposite direction, and running to the road, I saw, to my extreme joy, the Ladybird coming back towards us. " Good old William ! " I cried, and shouted the news to the others ; but my joy was premature, for there was a horrible grating sound, too familiar to the ears of a motorist, and The Ladybird pulled up a few yards from us. " Differential," said William quietly—he has a great ear for car-sounds—and without more words proceeded to jack up the back axle.

"Why did you come back?" I asked him, as he moved the lever up and down.

"Wondered where you had got, sir," he answered.

Good old William! but there was more in it than that, since, had no accident occurred, we should just about have been arriving at Port Macquarie now.

"Well, I'm glad you've come," I said, "because we have no petrol."

"Thought you were spelling for tea, sir," he replied.

"No, petrol tins sprung leaks," I said. William said nothing, but I thought I heard him whistle softly. "But it doesn't matter now you've turned up," I continued, "we can get enough from The Ladybird's tank to carry us on."

"Ladybird's tank's empty, too, sir, petrol pipe leaking, I was thinking to get a fill up from The Locust. . . ."

Thus the arrival of The Ladybird did not appear to be going to help us any, and the position had to be faced anew, with the added depression of disappointed hope! The girls treated it very lightly, Miss Muffet declaring that she had never camped out in her life, and thought that it would be "lovely."

"There's nothing else for it, I am afraid," I said, turning to Miss Durston.

"No," answered she, "but if it were raining, it would be worse, wouldn't it?" and I blessed her for her assumption of indifference—she who had shown emotion at the mention of the tattle of gossips. Seeing that there was really nothing else for it, for an inspection of The Ladybird's tank revealed only a few remaining drops of petrol I proceeded to make what arrangements I could for the comfort of the girls. William had the differential out by this, one of its teeth having broken and its two neighbours being considerably worn; he removed the broken fragments, and announced that she was quite fit to travel again. . . . Between us, we hauled and pushed the cars until they stood parallel with a space of four feet between them. Why William had not removed the camping outfit from The Ladybird, I do not know—his usual thought for possible contingencies, I suppose—for he was in the habit of emptying the car each night, and this night have gone so far as to unload the extra petrol tins. We stretched our waterproof sheet from hood to hood, fixing the four corners firmly, and we had a shelter from the heavy dew. Then we tied the mosquito net at its four corners under

the "roof" fixing them to the hood supports: the net was a single one, so had to be rather low, but that did not matter so long as its edges touched the ground all round, and to prevent the wind from blowing these up and letting the mosquitoes in, we staked them down on three sides, leaving one of the end sides for entry, weighting it with a sapling. I crawled in then, and having used my hands as brooms to sweep away a few ants that were on their way home, and having made sure that the tent contained no stray mosquitoes, since one each would have been quite enough to keep the girls awake all night, I arranged the rugs and cushions—and as cosy a nest as could be desired was provided, with not so hard a bed as you might imagine. Lastly, I laid ant-baits of cake and fruit, dates chiefly, here and there, a few feet from the nest, so that these busy creatures might not invade it in search of food. . . . The Locust's horn announced bedtime—it was quite dark—and the two girls and Boppo rejoined us, expressing their admiration for their cosy-looking shelter for the night.

Miss Muffet, with a comical air of secrecy, drew me aside, and holding my arm, whispered in my ear (or as near it as she could reach).

"Dr Perry——?" here she looked over her shoulder, to assure herself that no one was within whisper-distance, "I simply *can't* sleep in my—m-my stays," (this word in a sort of double whisper) "*Auntie doesn't wear any!* so will you be sure and keep the men away in the morning, when I p-put them on again?"

I had some difficulty in answering for laughter, but I managed to say:

"What men? I have sent William on a long walk to Port Macquarie for petrol!"

"Oh you know what I mean!" she said, and kissing her hand to me over her shoulder, she scuttled away.

Then Miss Durston bade me "Good night," and as I held the curtain up for them and Boppo to enter the nest, she handed me something, saying:

"Will you please take care of this for me?" And you may imagine the strange mixture of feelings when I saw that she had given me a small, six-chambered revolver! . . . Could woman's trust go further? . . . "Bless them both!" I thought, as I walked towards George, "her for her trust, and Miss Muffet for lessening the seriousness of the situation by her innocent, light-hearted joke.

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As I had had no sleep the night before, George stood the first watch, so, wrapping my rain-coat about me, with my head upon one of the car-seats, one hand grasping the revolver, I slept. And it seemed only a few moments before George aroused me with the information that it was two o'clock. . . . It was very dark and silent under the trees, and that I might not fall asleep, I paced up and down on the grass at the side of the road—the further side. . . . Then I lit one of The Locust's lamps, feeling a warmth of intimacy as I stood so near the nest, and wrote as far as this. . . . Good night, Amy dear; I can only hope that no unpleasant consequences may follow from this mad but unavoidable adventure!

Your loving brother,

Aston.

CHAPTER VIII

Port Macquarie, *Nov. 28th*, 1909

My dear Amy,

I left off writing last when the dawn of to-day, Sunday, was creeping in over the bush. Do you know that I cannot believe that Homer was always blind; he must once have seen a baby's hands or he could never have been so fond of, "But when the mother of dawn, rosy-fingered morning—"

As soon as the light began to come, I approached the nest, and gently woke Miss Muffet by holding her hand and pressing it until communication was established between us.

"What is it? where am I? why——?" she cried.

"Hush!" I whispered, "Stays!" and left her.

Next I started a fire, and in a few minutes had a billy of steaming tea, and, waking George, I filled the smaller Thermos (William had taken

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the larger one for refreshment on his long walk), and placed it, with two cups, by the tent; (the stays were on by this!) We had no milk, but we wanted it hot, for it was chilly, and George and I were glad enough to sit by the fire drinking scalding tea.

"How f-funny to get up without washing!" said Miss Muffet, as the ladies joined us, and I undertook to get them to Port Macquarie in plenty of time for a bath before breakfast.

By the time that we had unshipped and stowed the tent, William arrived driving a hired cart, alone, (sapient William), with a supply of petrol, and in a short time we were under way again, George and Miss Muffet in the cart, she driving, William in The Ladybird, and Miss Durston and Boppo beside me in The Locust. . . . We said very little; I can remember nothing except that, pointing to the revolver which I had placed on the seat between us, I asked: "May I keep this?"

"Please!" she said. . . .

It was still quite early when we reached Port Macquarie, but we managed to rouse a sleepy housemaid at the hotel (and I was glad now that I had sent the telegram, after all), and the ladies went to bed again, for Miss Muffet drove up in great style half an hour after us. Then William

asked if he might speak to me. "What is it, William?" I was feeling so much relieved that this untoward adventure had ended so satisfactorily, for not a soul was about to see us arrive, that I smiled, thinking that he had some trifling engine fault to tell me about.

"There's a man here, sir, inquiring for Miss Durston," he said.

"A man!" I exclaimed, "who? What sort of man? When did you find this out?"

"He's a kind of gentleman," he answered, "I don't know his name, but I heard him asking for the ladies at the hotel," indicating the one where the ladies were now, I hoped, sleeping. "They told him that they were expecting two ladies, but did not know their names."

"That's all you can tell me, William?"

"That's all, sir; that's why I came back to meet you last night, I thought the lady might like to know; but when I saw the trouble you were in, I thought it might wait until to-day."

"Thank you, William," I said, and he left me to attend to his precious cars, and to get some sleep. George and I crept into the neighbouring hotel, and finding an unoccupied bedroom, George undressed and was soon asleep. But I could not sleep, for I was curiously troubled by

William's news. The man could not be a relation, for Miss Durston had told me that she had none except an aunt, of whom she had not spoken with much cordiality . . . who could it be, then? . . . Well, it was no use worrying over it, we should learn in time. But I hoped fervently that, whoever he was, his coming would not result in the breaking up of our little party.

After a while I took my bathing-suit and towel, and went out to find a suitable place for a dip. There were only two or three early bathers in the surf, which was just rough enough to be enjoyable, and I was having a great time with the incoming rollers, for a man of six feet two inches can venture out further than most, when I heard a sudden appeal for help, and, turning in the direction from which it came, I saw a little head disappearing under the water. Two strides and I had hold of him, a boy of seven or so, and he was spluttering so, and clung to me so hard, that I had great work to keep my footing; moreover, the kiddie was wailing something which in the noise of the surf, and the excitement of the moment, I had difficulty in catching—"You're all right, sonny," I cried, "keep still and don't hold so tight—like this, not round my neck." But, "where's Emmie?" he wailed, and with a

cold chill gripping me, I understood what he had been trying to tell me—there was another of them! I looked about me searchingly, it could not have been many seconds, but it seemed long minutes before, following the direction of the frantically pointing hand of one of the bathers, I saw Emmie's head, fair and curly, bobbing up just beyond my reach. I had to swim for it this time, and groping under the water, being much encumbered with my boy, who went under the water as I swam, and spluttered and clung more than ever, I hauled up Emmie, nearly drowned, poor little soul, while the boy cried, "That's her, you've got her, mister," and Emmie, after getting rid of a great deal of water over me, hearing her pal's voice, choked out, "Hullo, Jimmie!" as though this were an everyday occurrence! It might have been funny if it had not been so jolly serious, for the two kiddies clung like limpets and I was out of my depth, treading water for dear life, for three dear lives!—and we were a hundred yards from the shore and the blessed tide was running out and taking us with it. . . . It was a very awkward position for a surgeon to be in, I can assure you, Amy, and I wished myself well out of it. . . . I talked quietly to the two youngsters, whom I was supporting facing each

other under my arms, while I lay on my back, and reassured them in some measure, though it was rather disconcerting when Jimmie said, "But why don't you swim in, mister?" and Emmie echoed, "Yes, why don't you?"

"I will in a minute," I answered, "but keep as quiet as you can, and *don't* put your arms round my neck, Jimmie. Steady now!" and I struck out with my legs all I knew. Amy, my dear, I would rather race you or anybody else a spanking half-mile with a bad handicap than have that to do again! Emmie was five, and they were both naked and as slippery as eels, and every time that one or other of them got a ducking my neck would be squeezed hard, and once, when they both did it together, we all went under and I thought we were done for. I let Jimmie go—but he didn't leave hold of me!—and I had to tread water for a minute to regain myself. I suppose we travelled about a yard a minute and we had over a hundred yards to go. . . . Well, I got 'em ashore at last, more by luck than good management, for the current took us some six hundred yards down among the rocks, and a heaven-sent eddy swirled us to a bit of sand. . . . They were as jolly as sand-boys, though cold, but I was as nearly done as ever I hope to be, and had to lie low for a

minute or two to regain the use of my knees, while, as it seemed, the whole population of the place crowded about me and them. I thought I should never get away from them—they wanted to unharness the horses and drag the carriage home—that sort of emotional frame of mind: and the two mothers who had been summoned to see their children drown! they kissed my hands . . . but I got away at last, and donning my clothes, made for the inn, the protection of which I was glad enough to secure. I don't know if you will think it strange that as I walked back my thoughts ran like this:—

“ When I die
 And feel no more,
 Let not the green turf cover my head!
 But let the sounding surf
 And the surges of the shore
 Be my last bed,
 When I die! . . . ”

But I don't want to die for a few years yet, please God!

Feeling uncommonly hungry and spent, though with that strange feeling of exaltation which comes only once or twice to a man when he knows that he has saved a human life, I went straight from my room to the breakfast-room of the other hotel, and when I opened the door the

first person upon whom my eyes rested was the Beast. He was a man named Morland, whom I had met in Brisbane.

"Hullo, Doc!" he cried—(how I hate the insolent familiarity of that vulgar form of address!) "Fancy meeting you! It's a small world, my masters!" those were his very words.

"Good morning, Mr Morland," I answered, with as little cordiality as I could, "I didn't know this was your part of the country," and passing him, I walked to the table and took a seat.

"Is that your p-professional manner?" whispered Miss Muffet, and "Good morning," said Miss Durston, who was looking pale and troubled, "are you not well? you look——"

"Thanks very much," I interrupted, "I'll be as right as rain when I have eaten something, I'm hungry."

Morland had looked his surprise at my knowing Miss Durston, and he chipped in:

"How did you get into this galley, Doc? I didn't know you knew my friend Miss Durston. I was just going to ask her permission to introduce you, I have been asking about the motor-trip, and they can't tell me the name of the place where they stopped last night. Perhaps you can?"

"They slept here," I said foolishly.

"Got here at four a.m.—I know all about that, Doc, but where did they spend the night. You can tell me the name?"

"Possibly," I said. And I noticed now that Miss Muffet was sitting in a glum silence, looking at her plate, and scarcely eating anything (I was ravenous), and that George was glowering at Morland as though he would like to eat him.

"Yes, but tell me!" persisted the Beast.

"What Miss Durston cannot tell you, I cannot," I said, and turned my back upon him, wishing that I could have thought of something more sensible to say. We ate in silence. What had happened, I wondered, while I was away? Morland tried to keep the ball of conversation rolling between himself and Miss Durston, but her replies to his questions consisted only of "Yes," "No" and "I don't know," and he gave it up. It was too horribly depressing for words, I assure you, Amy, so directly I had finished my meal, asking to be excused, I went to my room. But Miss Muffet had followed me to the door, and whispering, "Oh, Dr Perry, isn't he a b-beast!" returned to her place beside Miss Durston. Hence the title. . . . I wanted to go out, but I was afraid of being followed by

the silly crowd that I saw hanging about as I walked from one hotel to the other. A maid whom I met in the passage clasped her hands at me and said, "Oh, Doctor! . . ."

I had hardly closed my door when it opened again to let in George, looking as glum as an owl. Now you know that George is quiet and sober and all that, but he doesn't look solemn as a rule: there is always a twinkle to be seen by looking; so that I knew he had something worrying him. But he began quite differently from my expectations.

"What's all this d——n crowd outside, Aston?" And will you believe me that was the first time that I had ever heard him use a swear word, except when conversing with mosquitoes; he had no use for them, he used to say. Then he must have been in a condition of unusual irritation.

"What crowd?" I asked, but of course I knew.

"Oh, this crowd!" he said, throwing out his arms towards the open window, "can't you see? the whole town I should think."

"They are waiting to ask me to be Mayor of the town," I said.

"Oh, don't rot!" he exclaimed—he *was* irritable.

"I'll tell you," I said, and in a few words I told him of the bathing episode.

"Good man!" was all he said, when I had finished, but the crinkled look of pleasure on his face rewarded me.

"But let's get on to this other thing," I said, "we shall hear quite enough about that other before we've done, unless we can sneak out of the town by night. What's that fellow Morland here for? and how does he come to know Miss Durston? They don't live in the same street! He's the worst kind of cad that's made!"

"I don't know," answered George, speaking slowly but always to the point, "I'll tell you all I know—you're keener than I, perhaps you'll be able to make something of it. "We three had just taken our seats for breakfast and Miss Muf—Sutton (!) had just asked me where you were when the door opened, and "Ah! here he is," she said, and the man Morland walked in as brazen as brass, lady-like smile, walked right up to Miss Durston with his hand held out.

"How are you?" he said, "where did you stay last night? I lost the run of you?"

Miss Durston turned white like paper, and answered nothing; she didn't seem to see his

hand—it was great, that; and Miss Muffet said, “ Oh, Auntie! ” . . . but Morland went on, “ It’s a sight for sore eyes to see you again, Enid. . . . ” Enid? . . . But Miss Durston just took hold of the tea-pot and said, “ Tea, Elsie? I thought this was a private room? ” and poured out a cup. It was your cup, for Miss Sutton had one already. She seemed to recover her balance then, and talked to Miss Muffet and me a bit; she answered Morland’s questions, except the one about our camping-out night. Morland sat down to the table as though it were his, and I was just going to ask Miss Durston if I should turn him out, when you came in looking as sick as a ship-load of emigrants, and I was glad to see you, old man! What is it? Who is the brute? ”

“ I don’t know much about him,” I answered, “ but you shall hear what I do know. It doesn’t make me want to ask him to share any more meals with us.”

“ Miss Durston asked him to have tea with us to-night—it’s Sunday, you know.”

“ The devil she did! ” I exclaimed, surprised.

“ He asked to be allowed to have dinner with her, and she put him off by asking him to tea,” said George.

“ Looks like wishing to postpone a bad quarter

of an hour?" and we sat silent for a minute. "Looks, too, as though our idyllic holiday stood a chance of being spoilt. . . . But I'll tell you about Morland. I met the man first about six years ago; Clark, a Brisbane boating man, and a very good friend of mine, asked me to spend a Sunday with him on his twenty-six footer, and told me that among the men coming was a chap named Morland, whom he had never seen, but whom he had invited on the strength of a letter of introduction which had been left at his office. Morland came and made a mess of things, for he got beastly drunk in the afternoon and fell out of the boat; fortunately we could all swim, and as we thought he would drown, he was so drunk, all of us but Clark, who couldn't leave the tiller, jumped overboard after him. But to our surprise the brute could swim, and, drunk as he was, he managed to get to the boat without any help from us, and we felt silly enough, having had a ducking for nothing; then he sat and cried, shed tears like a hysterical female—it was horrible. We changed into dry clothes and set sail for home, no one speaking to the maudlin brute all the way, and he couldn't have been more than twenty-two then, till we reached the landing-stage, when Clark said—"Good day to you, sir,

go to—to Gympie, but don't ever come near me again!" And so felt all of us. He just waved his hand and walked away, steadily, too, as unconcerned as you please. We heard afterwards that he spread the yarn that Clark and the lot of us had been drunk and pushed him overboard, and Clark has never heard the end of it. . . . I forgot about him, except when I met Clark, who hasn't stopped apologising to me yet, until he turned up again a couple of years ago, having been back to England in the meantime. I was sent for to see a patient at Grantham's Hotel, and found a very sick Morland; he was apparently in funds, for he had been chucking money about in all directions, they told me. I had him removed to a private hospital, and operated the next morning: he gave me a most anxious time, but got round all right in the end. A month later he was well enough to go out, and asked me if I thought he could stand a railway journey, and I said yes if he exercised intelligent care.

"And how much shall I be owin' you, Doc?" he asked, with that silly assumption of the Irish accent which stands for humour with some people.

"Fifty guineas," I answered.

"By Gad! and very reasonable, too, old

chap!" he replied, "will it do if I post you a cheque from Grantham's this evening?"

"Of course," I answered, "no hurry!"

"*Noblesse oblige*," was his fatuous answer—I remember it because he pronounced it as though it were English. He went from the hospital to a near-by boarding house, though he had told the cabby "Grantham's" when he left, and next morning took the Sydney mail train, leaving Grantham's bill unpaid, and mine and the hospital's. The very worst kind of welcher that exists on the face of the earth: a remittance man, of course. . . . And now he turns up here, as a friend of Miss Durston's, having expected her, knowing something of her movements . . . what does it all mean?"

"Better get back, and see if they want us," was George's reply. "Expect they do, let's go!"

"Yes," I said, "let's! but I say, George, I'm glad you didn't try to turn him out of the room!"

"Yes," responded George, ruefully rubbing his head, "he looks as strong as a cow."

"He is," I said, "he is one of those feats-of-strength men, and was always showing off to the nurses when he was convalescing."

"I'll send for you next time," said George.

"Thanks!" I replied.

I can assure you, Amy, that though Morland is quite the worst of his kind that I have encountered, such men are not uncommon in Australia, which seems to be the dumping ground for the worthless undesirable—and glad enough their people must be to get rid of them—they receive remittances from home conditionally upon their calling for them personally at some bank in one or other of the State capitals. Reading about men of this stamp leaves a nasty taste in one's mouth, doesn't it?

We found Miss Durston and Miss Muffet in the drawing-room, a stuffy place but pleasant, in that it did not contain Morland.

"Oh, why did you go away?" cried Miss Muffet, and "Hush, child!" said Miss Durston.

"B-but I *will* speak, Id," retorted the girl, "I d-don't want to know anything about him, but please Mr Lidney and Dr Perry" (do you notice the order?) "let one of you be with auntie and me when that man is here, or I shall be sick, sick!" and she burst into tears. . . . Of course I am a bit used to scenes of this kind, I mean girls breaking down under stress and crying their hearts out, it often does them good, but it pulled at my heart to see little Miss Muffet like this, and

as for poor George, who likely enough had never seen such a thing before, I thought he was going to break down, too! But he just walked up to her (she had buried her face in Miss Durston's bosom), and putting his hand on her pretty head, said, with a queer quaver in his voice:

"Miss Muffet, will you come for a walk with me? I want to tell you something, and it's such a pretty town, and—and I'll talk like anything!"

It was just the fillip she needed, and George's "I want to tell you something," was great. Her sobs gradually subsided, and looking up with a tearful smile, she said: "B-but I'm such a f-fright!" and I wouldn't have blamed George a bit if he had kissed her there and then (I wanted to myself), she looked so exceedingly charming and to-be-petted. So presently they went out together, she calling back, "Dr Perry, you won't leave auntie for a minute while I'm away, will you? even if you want to ever so?" and I gravely answered that I would not. She is a sweet mischief-loving child.

Miss Durston and I moved out of the room and sat on a settee that stood in the lobby, as it was cooler and more comfortable than in the drawing-room. I could think of nothing to say, but my heart was very sore for her; she looked

so small and so very pretty! Every spark of sparkle had gone from her face—she whose every limb and feature had seemed to me to express the joy of living. I broke the silence by saying:

“I don’t want you to tell me anything, Miss Durston, now, or at any other time, which you would not wish to, but if you think I can be of any help to you, please let me ask you to ask it! . . . Will you?” And she put her hand to mine and said simply.

“Thank you, Dr Perry, I will. . . .” and I took it, though she shrank and tried to draw it away, and pressed it, twice, to my lips. . . . Presently we walked to the balcony, and for the first time she noticed the crowd outside, thinned a good deal by this time, for it was nearing Sunday dinner-time.

“What is it all about?” she asked, “the Governor is not expected here, is he?”

“I’ll go and see,” I answered, smiling. She put out her hand as though to stay me, but withdrew it, saying, “yes, please do! but don’t be long, will you?” and she smiled in a way that made my blood run riot. I was back in a few moments.

“I’m awfully sorry,” I said, “but they are waiting for me!”

“For you, Dr Perry? why?”

"Well you see," I said, and I have seldom had a more difficult explanation to make, "it isn't often that anything happens in a little place like this, and this morning, when I was surfing, I lugged two kiddies out of the water; they had got out of their depth, and—and those people are exaggerating the thing—they happened to be only children and both their mother's widows."

"And you never told me—us!" (Now, Amy, had I had a chance to?) "and that's why you looked so ill when you came to breakfast!"

"I was feeling hungry," I said, "and rather cheap."

"Cheap?" she cried, and again "cheap!" and she turned her back suddenly upon me, and seemed to be looking far away beyond the hills. Another moment and I would have seized her in my arms, but the tension of the moment was broken by the sound of Miss Muffet's rapidly approaching footsteps, and her voice crying, "Where are they?" She came rushing in, flushed and excited, so that I thought that George must have proposed to her ("I want to tell you something"), but she cried out.

"Auntie have you heard? Has he told you? do you see those people out there? Do you

know what everyone, *everyone* is talking about? did——”

“Steady on, Miss Muffet,” I interrupted, “one question at a time!—you’ll get us confused.”

“Oh, you!” she cried, “I c-could slap you! what has he told you, Auntie? has he told you anything?” and a comb dropped—she had taken off her hat and was twirling it round violently. Speaking very slowly Miss Durston answered.

“He told me, when I asked him, that he *lugged* two kiddies out of the sea when they got out of their depth. Is that what you want to tell me?”

“Yes, th-that’s it—that’s *all* of it—there!” She exclaimed, stamping her foot (another comb dropped), and actually she put her tongue out at me! Then she put a hand upon Miss Durston’s arm, and went on. “No, but it isn’t all, Auntie, l-let me tell you. He was out of his depth, too, and the sea was as rough as—as anything, and he caught hold of little Jimmie Chadwick, who tried to throttle him, then, as if it was not enough to save one, he swam out and picked up Emmie Bartlett, a sweet pet of five but rather dirty, and he swam on his back for *hours* against the tide in that sea, l-look at it! while the crowd of fishermen, as they call themselves, stood and gaped on

the shore, and when he was just exhausted he got them ashore, and came slinking home, as though he had stolen a p-purse or something! l-lugged—two—kiddies—out—of—their—depth indeed!” and she stopped for want of breath.

“Miss Muffet, please, please!” I cried, when I could at last put in a word, “you are really too dreadful, and you are not fair to the fishermen, for they could not possibly help . . . no, I won’t contradict a word of what you say,” for I saw that she was going to begin all over again, “if you love me, stop at that, will you?”

“I don’t love you a bit,” she said, shaking her head at me; and a third comb dropped, while I wondered if there were any more, “b-but I should like to k-kiss you, wouldn’t you, Auntie?” and she threw her arms round my neck and kissed me full and hard on the mouth, while George looked on in torment. He had picked up the combs as they fell.

“Now, Auntie——” she said.

“There, there, Muffie,” said Miss Durston, patting her arm, “I am sure that Dr Perry is amply rewarded. Now we must get ready for dinner, or we shall be late.” And I breathed again. It had been a strenuous morning. But

98 THE LOCUST AND THE LADYBIRD

I had not heard the last of it. Shall I ever?

When, with George, I went to the dining-room, I found an envelope addressed to me on my plate, and opening it, read:

“ There *was* a young man of Brisbane
Who revelled in sickness and pain,
He *lugged* two young kiddies,
(Their mothers both widdies)
From out of the blue rolling main.”

There wasn't much time to respond, but reversing the paper, I wrote hurriedly, in pencil:—

“ There *was* a young lady of Sydney,
Who lived on toast, porridge and kidney,
When she *kissed* Dr Perry
She turned red as a cherry
Because she was seen by one L——.”

I just had time to put the paper back in its envelope and place it on Miss Muffet's plate, as the two ladies came in. She was trying to look unconscious, and her surprise at finding the envelope on her own plate was great, and when she read my answering lines, she made a grimace at me, tried not to blush and failed, and, crumpling up the paper, thrust it within her blouse.

“ Won't you show me? ” asked George, boldly, for of course he had seen me writing.

"It's quite private!" said Miss Muffet, and poor George subsided.

We had a merry meal, for each one of us seemed intent upon throwing off the incubus of trouble with which the coming of Morland seemed to have burdened us. Lunch over, George and I went to the verandah, Miss Muffet saying that she was going to make "Auntie lie down for an hour." We found Morland on the verandah, sulking apparently, and picking his teeth. As we came out, William came along in The Locust, who was behaving most shamefully, going along on three legs as it were, missing horribly.

"What's the matter, William?" I asked.

"Timing out of gear, sir," answered William.

"Take her for a short spin," I said, "and fix it; we shan't be leaving here till to-morrow."

"What make is it?" asked Morland, and I foolishly answered, "Locust."

"More like a bally grasshopper!" he said, laughing loudly. And I was stupidly angered, and wished that its colour had not been green! But I said nothing, and Morland rose, stretched himself with a noisy yawn, and said:

"What price your seat on the—what you call it?—Locust to-morrow?" I hated that he should

call the good car by our private pet name, but I had brought it upon myself.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, look here! I'll toss you who drives The Locust to-morrow."

"No one drives my car but myself," I answered as frigidly as I could.

"And Bill," he said, with a grin.

"And William," I corrected.

"Don't be shirty, Doc!" he went on, "you're not the only man in Australia who can drive a motor-car."

"I'm the only man in Australia who's going to drive her to-morrow!" I replied.

"Oh, all right! Keep your hair on, what there is of it! let's go for a swim?"

"Very well!" I said, surprised at the suggestion, and glad to think that this would take the beast away from the neighbourhood of the ladies for an hour or so.

"Look here," said Morland, as we walked down to the beach, "I'll race you for that seat on the Grasshopper—I beg yours!—The Locust."

"No, thank you," I answered shortly.

"Well, I'll race you for a fiver," he suggested.

"A swimming race?" I said, and for a moment the old dominant desire caught me.

"Yes," he replied.

"What distance?" I asked, hoping he would suggest half a mile.

"Two-twenty, or a quarter," he answered; and an idea came to me.

"Those are Mr Lidney's distances," I remarked, mendaciously.

"Lidney?" laughed Morland, contemptuously.

"I'll take you on," said George, up in arms.

"Make it a tenner!" suggested Morland.

"With pleasure," responded George, "I suppose you don't happen to know that Dr Perry was at one time half-mile champion of England?"

"No, I don't!" said Morland.

"He was," said George, shortly.

"Never mind him," said Morland, "the tenner is between you and I," and I shuddered.

"How about throwing in your seat in the Grasshopper?" He was so sure of himself that he didn't apologise.

"If Dr Perry will allow me?" said George.

"Certainly," I said, but I began to feel less comfortable. The Beast could swim, evidently.

"Mind, I'll hold you to it!" said Morland, "no tricks with yours truly!" But we did not deign to answer him.

I have not described Morland to you, yet, and perhaps I ought to do so now. I will try to be fair. He is an upstanding man of six feet, who looks as though he might have been an athlete if he had taken care of himself, but he is a little deep, fore and aft, in the waist-line, for a man of twenty-eight or so, and his face is getting puffy, already; but he looks very well, stripped. Dark curly hair, a waxed moustache, a strong chin, (the most misleading of all the features), and a slack mouth: a pretty boy, once, and a year or two ago, when I knew him first, indeed, a fine-looking man: dressed in the ultra-fashion, in somewhat worn flannels, and white boots. Is he clear? . . . As the opponents undressed, he turned to me:

"Feel inclined to put a fiver on your fancy, Doc?" he asked.

"I'll bet you five pounds Mr Lidney beats you," I answered, "if that's what you mean?"

"You've hit it first time," he replied, chuckling, "and look! I'm giving you odds, because you'll be starter and judge, see?"

I could have struck him across his insolent face, but I didn't. I am waiting. I feel it in my bones that he and I are to try physical conclusions, but the time is not yet. . . . We paced

the distance (Morland had chosen two-twenty), and marked it, and whispering to George to go all he knew from the jump, they took up their positions, I gave the word "Go" with my back turned to them, and they were off. I ran to the finishing mark and watched. The man could swim, and with the evident intention of paralyzing George, he made it a cracker, so that at the end of the first hundred he was leading by two body-lengths, and I felt in my pocket to see what money I had with me! But Morland didn't know George the plodder. Looking back, Morland changed his stroke to the single over-arm, facing George, who in ten more yards had caught him, plugging away with his steady trudgeon, and apparently unconscious of Morland's whereabouts. I saw a look of surprise and annoyance upon Morland's face, and he turned to trudgeon again; but he had shot his bolt in that first sprint, and assuming an indifference which he could not have felt, he sang out, "That's enough, Lidney, I'm beaten!" but he swam on, more slowly. George was not to be taken in, however, and he took no chances, but swimming steadily on, reached and passed the finishing mark thirty yards in front of Morland, who was now splashing along carelessly on his back. Morland left

the water and dressed quickly, making no response to my "My fiver, Mr Morland!" or to George's, "My tenner, Mr Morland, and my seat in The Locust! you Beast!" the last two words being under his breath. Until to-day I have always thought it cowardly to jeer at a beaten enemy. . . . I need hardly add that the Beast has made no reference, since, to the race or to the bets.

William was awaiting me when we got back to the hotel.

"May I speak to you, sir?" he said.

"What is it, William?" I asked, going aside with him.

"Mr Morland offered me five pounds to cripple The Locust, sir."

"Did he show you the money?"

"He jingled it, sir."

"He hasn't got as much, William."

"My troubles, sir! but I think I'll sit up with The Locust to-night."

"Yes, do! perhaps it would be as well. I am afraid," I went on, "that you are likely to have some of Mr Morland's company for a day or two."

"How's that, sir?" asked William, anxiously.

"In The Ladybird," I said, "he seems to have attached himself to our party."

"Then I might show him some driving, sir?" he suggested.

"Y-yes," I answered, hesitating, "but not to-morrow."

"Very well, sir," he answered, and he went away chuckling. And then I suddenly thought that I had forgotten to inquire as to The Locust's welfare!

But my troubles were not yet over. One of the maids, meeting me, said that two ladies wished to see me in the drawing-room. To the drawing-room I therefore went, to find there Mrs Chadwick and Mrs Bartlett, in their best clothes, and Jimmie and Emmie likewise. The ladies rose as I entered, and, "Now then, Jimmie!" said the mother of young hopeful: Jimmie shamefacedly approached me, and, at arm's length, handed me a very good briar pipe in its case, and retreated rapidly. "Now then, Emmie!" (it was like a lesson), and little Emmie shyly came forward, and put a tobacco pouch in my hand. And do you know I was never nearer crying in my life, as I stooped and kissed her! . . . They didn't stay long—I didn't let them! though I believe the ladies had intended to make an afternoon of it, taking as long as they decently could over the tea (cakes for the kiddies) which I

ordered for them. As they went away, blessing me, I shut a sovereign into the hand of each of the children, and making them promise not to look—see, until they got home, waved them “Good-bye.”

Next I had an interview with a frowsy, but most respectful cockney variety company manager, who, presenting his card, asked if he could make it worth my while to stay over Monday, and do a turn with his company. He offered me five pounds! and was so earnest, and poor, and so respectful, that I had hard work in saying, “No,” but I bought a dozen front seat tickets for, “myself and my friends!”

After the cockney, the editor of the local paper; after him, the local correspondent of one or two Sydney papers; and after him, the Mayor—till I almost wished that I had never learned to swim! . . .

Morland came in to tea, and brought with him a bottle containing about four dozen fine oysters. “Caught ’em myself!” he announced, grinning, as he emptied them on to a plate and proceeded to eat them. The maid was bringing us some soup, which formed the method of compromise between “dinner” and “tea,” but Miss Muffet hurriedly whispered something to her, and she retired to

the sideboard, smiling; Miss Muffet then sat, her hands clasped upon the table, and watched every oyster disappear. As the last one went, she heard an exaggerated sigh, and murmuring, "I *love* oysters!" signalled to the grinning waitress to put on our soup. Morland didn't turn a hair. The meal passed off without any unpleasantness, except that Morland sucked his soup from the point of his spoon, and allowed his food to be seen after it had entered his mouth, little circumstances which might be expected from a man who says, "Between you and I" and "I beg yours!"

Miss Durston having expressed a wish to go to church, George escorted the two ladies there, but I stayed back to write. Good nights were said immediately upon the return of the church party, and here I am! So good night to you, Amy dear, and don't go to sleep over my letters.

I am, your loving brother,

Aston.

CHAPTER IX

Port Macquarie, *Nov. 29th*, 1909

My dear Amy,

Port Macquarie is a beautiful little place, and has been here long enough to look old—not old as you count things in England, but old enough, quaint and unscattered and unsquare with its red-roofed cottages on the irregular red-soil heights of the township, its old brick church falling into disrepair, and its queer old main street. I was up before the sun this morning, wandering about alone with my camera. I had reached the undulating downs above the shore, when I saw Miss Durston sitting there, writing. For a few moments I stood and watched her, and wish now that I had had the courage to take her picture! Her hat was off, and the light morning breeze was playing with her matchless hair; her elbow was in her lap, the pencil with which she had been writing pressed against her

lips, her look far out to sea, beyond the horizon, as it seemed.

“ Good morning, Miss Durston,” I said.

“ Good morning, Dr Perry, I thought I should find you out here.” (There is no subterfuge about her). So I sat down, and together we watched the seagulls swooping down to catch their breakfast, hovering on quivering wings, their eyes missing no slightest movement in the water.

“ Do you know Swinburne’s sea-men song? ” she asked.

“ I have read it,” I replied.

“ I love its music,” she went on, “ there are two verses of which I am particularly fond ; may I repeat them? ”

“ Do! ” I said. And without any bashfulness, looking away to the distance, she said the lines in her beautiful voice :

“ ‘ The lark knows no such rapture,
Such joy no nightingale,
As sways the songless measure
Wherein thy wings take pleasure :
Thy love may no man capture,
Thy pride may no man quail ;—
The lark knows no such rapture,
Such joy no nightingale. . . .

Ah! well were I for ever
 Wouldst thou change lives with me
 And take my song's wild honey,
 And give me back thy sunny
 Wide eyes that weary never,
 And wings that search the sea;—
 Ah! well were I for ever
 Wouldst thou change lives with me!

The whole poem is very beautiful," she added, "but those are my favourite verses."

"And mine," I responded. . . . We continued to watch the gulls and other birds, two of which, with pretty bronze-coloured wings, were hunting together. . . . Just before we got up to go to the hotel, she tore a leaf from her writing-block, and crumpling it in her hand, pushed it under the sand between us, and I, shamefully, put my hand over the place, and, as I rose, grasped it with a handful of sand, and put it in my pocket. As we reached the side of the hotel, Miss Durston, who had said nothing since we had risen, stopped, and facing me, asked:

"Are we going on to-day, Dr Perry?"

"We?" I said, with no attempt to hide my gladness.

"Yes, if you will have us?" she answered, simply.

"Thank you," I said, "yes, I think we might

start after breakfast if the weather holds ; it looks rather like rain."

" Oh, I hope not! " she said, " but it is very pleasant here, is it not? and, Dr Perry, about, about Mr Morland? "

" Mr Morland! " I exclaimed, surprised, " one day of his company will last me for a long time."

" Y-yes, but, Dr Perry," and her hesitation was painful to us both, " will you mind, may I ask you to let him come with us? " and she turned her face away.

" Of course," I blundered, " any friend of yours——"

" He is not a friend of mine," she interrupted, looking straight in my eyes, " but——"

" I beg your pardon! " I said, " I am glad." She shuddered, and speaking with evident effort, said :

" Thank you! but if he asks, will you mind letting him come? "

" Not at all," I said, " of course! " and placing my finger on my button, I added, " do I not belong to the Order of servitude? " for I knew that Miss Muffet had told her of our conversation.

" Thank you," she murmured, and again, " Thank you!" and leaving me abruptly, she disappeared on to the verandah, but not quickly

enough to prevent me from seeing that there were tears in her eyes. . . . Confound the brute! who is he at all? What is his hold over her? For that she fears and shrinks from him is plain to see. But he shall not come in The Locust—The Ladybird is too good for him, but The Locust is “too better!” I am glad that I warned William that he might be coming. . . .

Miss Muffet asked at breakfast, if there would be time for her to do some shopping. “I want to buy a gossamer,” she said, (“half an hour,” I muttered audibly) “and some hair pins,” (“Twenty minutes,” I calculated), “be quiet, you rude man, and some combs!”

“Then we will start at half-past nine,” I said.

“If the shops are open?” queried Miss Durston.

“They’ll open fast enough, if you ask them, Miss Muffet,” I said—and so they did.

Meanwhile, I sought Morland, and told him there was a seat for him in The Ladybird, if he wished. He accepted this with a bad enough grace, but saw that it was all he could get, and walked away grumbling. I found William, too, and giving him his instructions, went back to the hotel, and waited for the ladies, and George, who had accompanied them on their shopping expedition.

It was ten o'clock before we were all ready, and when we had travelled the seven miles of most excellent convict-built road, and experienced the full joy of coasting on a smooth surface, Miss Muffet suddenly exclaimed, as we came to a finger-post indicating the road to Kew.

"Oh, Auntie! I've l-left my purse behind!"

"M-much in it?" I asked.

"Don't please, Dr Perry, it's all I've got!"

"Right you are, Miss Muffet, don't worry!" for I saw that she was really distressed, "no one could mind going over that lovely bit of road again." Indeed, I don't think that any of us did, and when, just as we were re-entering Port Macquarie, and just, too, as we met The Ladybird, with Mr Morland lolling in the back seat, smoking a cigar, with William grinning beside John in front—when it began to rain, I was glad that we had turned back. William needed no instructions (his grin was the result of a victory over the Beast, who had demanded to be allowed to drive, but who found that so long as he held the wheel, The Ladybird would not go!) he turned The Ladybird, and following us to the hotel, took the two cars under shelter.

As the rain, soft, but steady, seemed to have set in, (Miss Muffet found her purse lying on a chair on the verandah), we decided to delay our departure from Port Macquarie, until to-morrow morning. Our hostess was pleased to see us again, and provided some oysters with our "eleven o'clock." George took his seat by Miss Muffet as usual, but immediately got up and left the room, unnoticed by Miss Muffet, who was in full argument with me, as to the respective merits of N. S. Wales, and Queensland oysters, (and those of Port Macquarie were certainly the finest I had ever seen, though I would not admit it!) when she turned in her sudden way and said:

"You agree with me, Mr L——?" and her look of disgust, when she found herself facing Morland, was so ludicrous, that we all laughed—except Morland.

"My chair, please," said George, coming in at that moment, and looking surprised at our hilarity.

"There's one over there," said Morland, rudely.

"This is mine, thank you!" said George, resolutely.

"I appeal to the lady," said Morland, with a silly simper.

"Mr Lidney was sitting there before you came in," said Miss Muffet gravely.

"I bow to your decision," returned Morland, "but I shall be able to see you better from the other side."

"Isn't he a b-beast?" whispered Miss Muffet to me as he walked across.

When we had finished, Morland rose, and going behind George's chair, said:

"Have you ever seen this done?" and before George could stop him, he had stooped and lifted George, chair and all, above his head! It was a magnificent display of sheer strength, and we could not help exclamations of wonder, as he gently put the chair down again. But George was horribly annoyed, and had an evident difficulty to restrain showing his anger, before the ladies.

"Oh, how wonderful!" Miss Muffet exclaimed involuntarily .

"Would you like——?" began Morland.

"No, thanks!" said Miss Muffet, as she hurriedly rose from her chair. . . .

I went to the local photographers, to examine his stock of views, and, returning, came to my

room to write. A few minutes later George came in, and threw himself on the bed with a sigh.

"Hullo, old man!" I said, "what have you been doing? I thought you were with the ladies?"

"Been trying to keep the Beast sober, and have not been altogether successful. You must stand watch after luncheon, I'm full up of him."

"Right!" I answered.

Lunch was a gloomy meal. Morland had reached the silent, go-carefully stage, but became talkative as the meal proceeded. He evidently considered himself to be one of the party, now, and rather than distress Miss Durston, by speaking about it, we put up with him. After the meal was over, I led him to the verandah, and suggested that a camp would do him good; he yielded without demur, and was soon asleep. I brought my writing materials out, and went on with my letter, until he woke with a bad taste in his mouth, and swore. He insisted upon visiting the bar, where he tried to get up a flirtation with the barmaid, whom he had evidently impressed already, with his feats of strength. I took him for a long walk in the gentle rain. He

didn't want to come, but I induced him, somehow, to accompany me, and, once out, I kept him going.

"What's that bally button?" he suddenly asked me, and would have touched it, had I not covered it quickly with my hand. I moved to his other side, so that the button was away from him, before I answered.

"Just a whim," I said.

"Women, more likely!" he remarked, coarsely; and his enjoyment of the vulgar pun, helped to prevent him from pursuing the inquiry. Later he reverted to the question of where we had stayed on Saturday night. "I had reasons for wanting to see Miss Durston," he said, "and I found that she was at Lismore on Wednesday, and Grafton on Thursday, lost the run of her on Friday, but heard that she had passed through Kempsey on Saturday afternoon, and the next thing, you all arrive here early on Sunday morning. I should like to know how you put in your time between Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning." And he leered at me.

"How did you find out all this?" I asked in my turn.

"Oh, I found out!" he said, smiling knowingly.

"Then you may find out the rest that you want to know in the same way," I said, and I knew that I had him.

"You bet, I will!" he replied, "but it looks d——d fishy, especially after her past——" and then he stopped, as though he wished me to question him. But if he did, he was disappointed, for I said nothing, though I must admit that I was curious. He hardly spoke again, except to curse the mud of the roads, and to ask how far we still had to go. We arrived back "tired, hungry, cross and muddy"—but in time for dinner (do you recognise the quotation? Lewis Carroll—I hope it's correct!), after which I left him to his own devices. He spent the evening in the bar, laying down the law to the tap-frequenters, and getting laughed at for his pains, for they had easily labelled him "remit-tance-man," and despised him accordingly. . . .

Have I told you that Miss Muffet's laugh is the most fascinating thing in the world? She laughs with her whole body, as though she were hugging the joke: George enjoys this so much, that he lets himself go, and we spent a very pleasant evening.

"Take care!" I said to Miss Muffet, as I was bidding her good night, the other two having

left the room, and I put my finger under her chin to receive the surprise of seeing her eyes full of tears.

"Why?" she asked.

"Love is a consuming fire," I answered, sentimentously, "it burneth her who gives, and him who takes!"

"I n-never thought it would hurt l-like this," she sobbed, holding the lapels of my coat, and hiding her face against my chest; "if—if I thought he didn't care for me, I should wish to d-die!"

"I think he does, dear," I said, "all in good time!"

"Thank you, doctor, dear! you *are* a dear, you know!" and drying her eyes with the handkerchief, which she took from my pocket, (and which I hope I shall get back) she went her way. . . . And I was strangely affected by her show of confidence. . . . I saw Miss Durston for a moment, as I was leaving the house, and drawing the crumpled piece of paper from my pocket, which she had buried, and I had picked up this morning, I said: "May I read this?"

"What is it?" she asked, wonderingly.

"The paper you pushed under the sand this morning."

"Oh, that! yes, if you wish—it's—Good night!" and she was gone. This is what I read:

"The little brown-winged bird that seeks its food
From off the crested surface of the cruel sea,
Has but one thought, that his small world is good;
He seeks, and finds, and sleeps—just living
happily."

Don't you think it very pretty, Amy? . . . I shall keep it.

When I got to our room, I found George standing dressed before the window, looking at the dark. He turned as I entered.

"Look here, Aston!" he said, "I can't go on like this much longer!"

"What do you mean?" I asked, but I knew.

"You must see how it is with me, man," he answered, "and—and I am not worthy to kiss her shoe-buckles."

"I thought you would have asked her permission to do so this morning," I suggested.

"I meant to when we went out," he answered, simply, "but I couldn't, somehow. I was so afraid that if she—if she said 'No,' I would have to leave her, and go on alone. . . . Besides," he added, "look at this beastly beard!"

"Just as well, perhaps," I said, "to-morrow or the next day?"

“Do you think I have a chance? you know her better—at least you have known her longer than I?”

“You deserve a chance with any woman,” I replied, for I could not say more. . . . Then he undressed, and I think I will, too. Good night, my dear sister.

Your loving brother,

Aston.

CHAPTER X

Stroud, *Nov. 30th*, 1909

My dear Amy,

We left Port Macquarie, at six o'clock this morning, partly that we might have the early morning run, but chiefly because I wanted, we all wanted, to leave Morland as far behind as possible. I knew that he would not want an early breakfast, after his carouse of the previous night.

It was a perfect morning, cool, and clear, and deliciously fresh after the rain, which had laid the dust, and improved the going, the roads being all that could be desired, and we bowled along right merrily, exulting that we were leaving the Beast further behind with each mile.

We were leaving the sea, going inland, but after a few miles of pleasant, winding road, turned to the left and ran parallel with it, but it

was out of sight, hidden by the great timber, while in the valleys between the ridges, the untouched coastal scrub of palms, and tropical-looking undergrowth, held us in admiring delight, so that even an ancient motoring joke from *Punch* amused us:

"That's a lovely peep, Dr Perry," said Miss Muffet.

"It was!" I answered—and we all laughed: Even Boppo was happy, he had not appreciated the hotel life, as his mistress had kept in doors so much, and he hated Morland. . . . Miss Durston was at my side, and though I gave all the necessary attention to the wheel, I found time to look at her beautiful profile, and to wonder . . . wonder if I had any chance. A delightful kind of intimacy had sprung up between us, the outcome of our mutual dislike for Morland, and it warned me: there was a change in her voice, as though, as it seemed to me, she were regarding me as in some way a protection. . . . How I longed to whisper in her pretty shell-coloured ear that I loved her, great God! how much! . . . And if I can find favour in her gracious sight, I will spend the rest of my life trying to prevent thorns from getting in her path. . . . I had taken a sympathetic interest in Miss Muffet and George

up to now; but now I knew that they were for each other, and I had no care for them; all my thoughts were centred in myself and her, there was no room for others. . . .

Through Camden Haven, where on our left appeared a great blue shining arm of the sea, very inviting, to funny little Coopernook, where we had breakfast. We had passed a number of bullock-drawn, timber wagons, and one of these, unfortunately unloaded, I snapped. The owner hid behind the trees lest I took him in his dirty clothes, but when I made a note of his address and promised him a copy of the picture, he expressed regret at having been so shy! At Coopernook we were welcomed by a hostess whose magnificent array, blue silk dress and white shoes, suggested a recent wedding. As we sat down, Miss Muffet gravely said, "Mr Lidney, your hair is untidy, m-may I fetch you a candlestick?"

Dear old George, he's in for a time when he's married, but he seems to enjoy it well enough now! I have a good mind to bind and gag him, and shave his cheeks and chin; I believe that nothing will induce him to take off his beard now, unless it be a request from Miss Muffet.

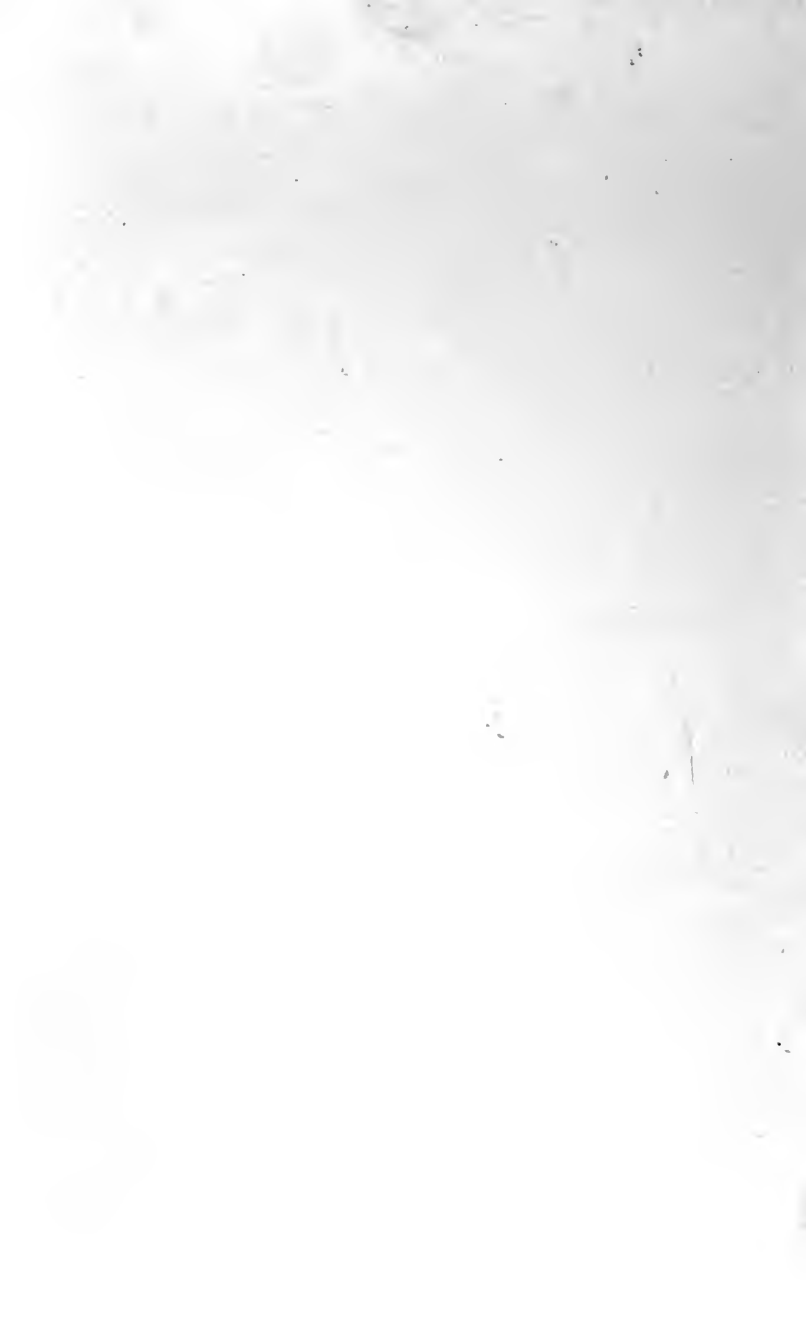
A buggy, and pair of creamy ponies stood in



Bullock Team . . . Timber Waggon.



Buggy and Motor Car . . . Cooperbrook.



front of The Locust as we came from breakfast, and they presented an excellent contrast in methods of bush-travelling. There was no sign of The Ladybird as we started away again in high spirits. . . . We passed through much monotonous timber country, until we reached another range, which we slowly mounted by the roads cut in its side, the view first on one side and then upon the other being grand and inspiring. Only here and there was there any fence-protection on the gorge side of a sharp bend, so that I had to drive carefully. A little after one o'clock a loud report told us of our first serious tyre-accident, and George and I had to tackle the hot and dirty task of replacing the old tyre and tube with new. Fortunately The Locust carried these, in addition to the Stepney which I wished to reserve for a final emergency. While we toiled, the girls made a fire and boiled the billy, and we presently had a pleasant meal in the shade of a tree near a dam and a running stream. We were silent, something of the quiet beauty of our surroundings and the stillness of the bush affecting us. Miss Durston sat with her back towards the direction from which we had come, and I could see that she was listening, and once, indeed, she started and looked round suddenly ;

but it was not The Ladybird, but a buggy, with a very fine pair of young bay horses who required considerable coaxing before they could be induced to pass the stationary Locust.

"I have instructed William!" I said to her in a low voice, and she smiled her thanks into my eyes. . . .

Miss Muffet was sitting, opposite to me, with her hands clasped over her bent-up knees, and she suddenly spoke:

"Dr Perry," she said, "have you ever saved a life before?"

"I hope so, indeed!" I answered, "I'm a doctor, you know."

"Oh, not like that," she exclaimed, "I mean from drowning."

"Once," I said, for I had an idea.

"Oh, p-please tell us!" she said, and she settled herself comfortably for a yarn.

"It was in Southport," I said, "Southport, Queensland, of course; I was sitting on the sand, watching the gambols of a little patient of mine, whom I had known since she was born. . . . She was having a great time in the shallow water, a curly, black-haired little thing with no clothes on. She rushed about with frantic delight for some time, until, suddenly, she had a bad fit,

and fell down on her side with her face under the water. I had attended her for similar attacks before. Of course, I was in after her in a moment—the water was only up to my ankles, and soon had her out and round again. But when she came to herself she would have none of me, but trotted home, howling.”

“What was her name?” asked Miss Muffet, with wide eyes.

“Norah,” I replied.

“How sweet!” she said, “what became of her after?”

“I don’t know,” I said, “I gave her away.”

“You gave her away?”

“Yes,” I answered, preparing for flight, “she was an Australian terrier pup.” And I fled. The only missile that reached me was an empty marmalade tin, and I believe that George threw that. . . .

More range country, up and up on second and first speeds—then delightful long winding coasts with an “Oh!” or an “Ah!” from Miss Muffet as we turned a sharp bend: very beautiful as mountain scenery always must be. Through Cundle Town, Taree, Kramback, Gloucester; and so on to Stroud without adventure or stirring circumstance. Gloucester and Stroud! but

how un-English the little township! Stroud, with its one street and humble inn, and its most un-banklike-looking Bank. . . . The Ladybird, with William's unfailing instinct, reached Stroud, but five minutes after us.

"I expected you would have overhauled us when we were having lunch, William," I said, "we had a burst tyre."

"I saw you, sir, but *he* didn't," and he jerked his head in the direction of The Ladybird, "but there was a bend of the road close by, and when we got there the coil played up," (isn't he invaluable?) "but he heard you start off again."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, he just said—he just swore, sir."

"How did you manage about food?"

"We had breakfast at half-past eight at Port Macquarie, sir, and John and I had some bread and cheese and Thermos tea on the road!"

"And Mr Morland?"

"He had a flask with him, sir."

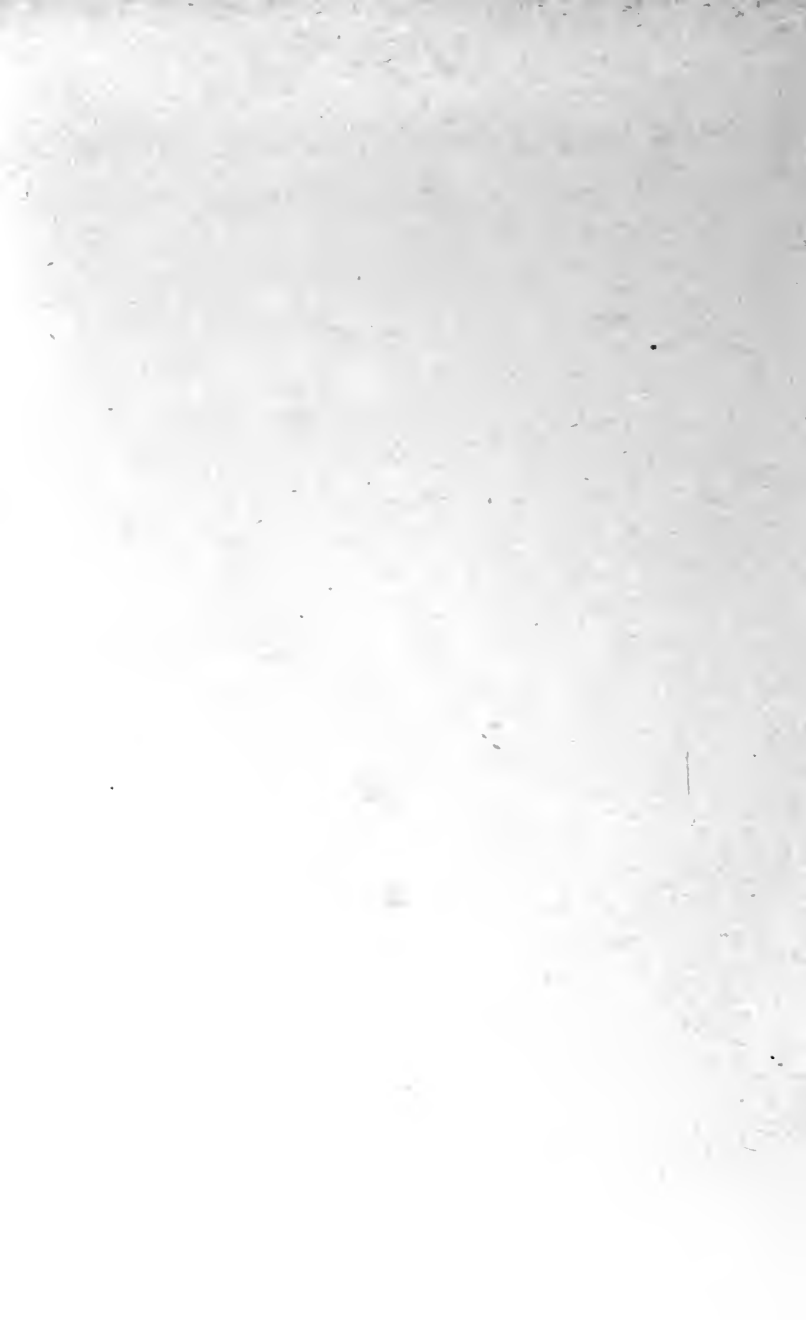
Morland was asleep, and had not waked when The Ladybird stopped. I woke him, however, for George had learned of a swimming-pool, and we could not leave him behind. He was irritable, of course, (his flask was empty) but he came with us. I took Boppo, too, but had to carry



Between Gloucester and Stroud.



" Un-bank like looking Bank."



him, for only so could I get him away from his beloved mistress.

"What did you bring that cur for?" asked Morland.

"He likes a swim," I said; and he enjoyed it as much as we, and having managed to get one bite at Morland, cleared for home. Morland is at his best in the water, and but for Boppo's attack on him, would have been in a good temper when we got out. George and I, having been brought up to it, prefer fresh water to salt, but Morland prefers the sea, in which strong swimmers are made. He swam and plunged and dived with great strength and skill, and for a few minutes I almost felt that I didn't dislike him!

"Gad!" he said, "if a man could get a bathe like that every day, what?"

"What indeed!" I answered, and wished that we had an unpolluted pool like that in Brisbane.

Morland tries to draw me as to our intentions for to-morrow. "Where do you go from here, Doc?" he asked.

"Maitland, to-morrow, I think," I answered, "and probably on to St Albans."

"I should advise Newcastle," he said.

"Why?" I asked drily. (I never say "Why" without thinking of little Miss Muffet).

"Save a day," he answered, "ship the cars there and go on by train ourselves." (Ourselves!)

"It depends a good deal on the weather, and the state of the roads, and——" but I stopped.

"And what?" he asked.

"It depends altogether upon Miss Durston's wishes," I finished, telling the truth. Morland smiled and said nothing for a minute. Then:

"I tell you what, Doc. I can manage her all right! Which do you want?"

"Thanks!" I answered, feeling hotter than I hope I looked, "I can manage my own affairs, and I shall not try to influence Miss Durston."

"But I will," he retorted, "and what I say to her goes."

"You?" I exclaimed, surprised.

"Yes, me!" he said, "who else? I shall persuade her to ship her car at Newcastle, and go on by train. And I shall go on by train, too. You and Lidney can do what you jolly well please."

"It's no business of mine," I answered, burning with indignation. But I changed my mind with reference to not trying to influence Miss Durston. "His influence against mine then," I thought, "so be it." I had first innings, as I thought I should, for Morland made straight for

the bar, while I found the ladies sitting on the little "private" verandah.

"Had a nice b-bathe, Dr Perry? what a long time you've been; Boppo came back long ago!"

"May I speak to you for a minute, Miss Durston?" I said.

"Oh, what a rude man!" Miss Muffet exclaimed, "Mr Lidney, will you sit by me, please, and answer me when I speak to you?" and in a whisper she added, "what's the matter?" But I only smiled at her, and drawing Miss Durston aside, without any prelude, I said:

"Mr Morland has told me, Miss Durston, that he will try to induce you to abandon the prettiest part of the journey—I mean from Wollombi to Wiseman's ferry—you know I have been over it before—and ship The Ladybird from Newcastle. Please don't!" She was silent for a moment, and then spoke very slowly.

"I cannot thank you enough, Dr Perry, for looking after me, after Miss Muffet and me, so kindly since—since we reached Port Macquarie, and before that, indeed; but I think it would be better that our trip together should end to-morrow—better for all of us." I was astonished at her words, and blurted out, "For Miss Muffet and George?" It was unfair, perhaps, but I was

taken by surprise. I had not believed that Morland could have any chance. And now I had made her cry! For her beautiful eyes filled and ran over. She let the tears run down her cheeks as she looked straight up at me.

"I am sorry, I beg your pardon, Miss Durston, I am a cad!"

"Oh, no! not that! you?" she said, "please don't, please! . . . I can see how it is with them . . . what shall I do?"

"They are enjoying the trip very much," I said, "but not more than I am."

"Yes, indeed, and so am I," she replied, "you believe that, don't you? but——"

"Hullo, Doc!" from the Beast, interrupting her, "had a delightful swim, Miss Durston, pity you and Miss Muffet——"

"Miss Sutton, if you please," from the rear.

"Miss Sutton, I beg yours," said he with a mock bow, "pity you can't have a bathe, eh?" (No response). "But I say, Enid, I'm about sick of this way——"

"My name is Durston," said that lady.

"Since when?" asked Morland with a laugh, "I thought that somewhere about July——"

Miss Durston went very white, and rose from her chair: "Half a mo', Miss Durston," said he,

"look here, it's all very well for you people, but, I've had enough of the sight of Bill and John's backs for a lifetime. What do you say if we ship the car to-morrow, and go on by train?" The effrontery of the "we" was not lost on any of us, but we waited anxiously for Miss Durston's reply. As this did not come, Morland went on: "All the best people do that—no decent accommodation between Newcastle and Sydney, and beastly roads."

"Maitland is——" began Miss Durston, and "That's not true," I said.

"Oh, yes, Maitland," replied Morland, ignoring me, "but what about after? it's a long walk from Maitland to Sydney!" and he laughed.

"A hundred and forty miles," I said, "easily done in one day."

"Barring accidents," said Morland.

"Even so," I said, "there are several places where we could stop."

"Good enough for men, or for ladies traveling alone," he sneered, "unless you thought of camping out, Doc?" I said nothing to this, but I went white with anger at his hinted suspicion, and he went on: "Well, which is it to be Mrs—— beg pardon, Miss Durston? ship the car at Newcastle, or the other? you know which

I would advise." At the word "Mrs" Miss Durston's face flamed with anger, and saying, "I shall leave it to Dr Perry," swept away into the house, drawing her skirts aside as she passed the Beast.

"Oh, so!" said Morland, and he managed to put a deal of offensiveness into the words, "which is it to be, Doc?"

"Road," I said shortly.

"Well, that settles it, I suppose, but I hope you and Miss Durston, as she calls herself, won't regret it."

"What do you mean?" I cried in great anger.

"You'll know soon enough, without my telling you!" he retorted, and turning on his heel he left us, angry and full of wonder.

"Dear, dear! this is getting unbearable!" said Miss Muffet, "I must go to Auntie, I'm sure she wants me."

"Yes, do!" I said, "and ask her to try to come in to dinner with us—to try and act as though nothing unpleasant had happened."

"I will," she said, and disappeared, leaving George and me to look at each other and say nothing.

Fortunately, there were one or two other diners at the single table which the room contained, and

Morland's entrance when we were half through the meal, was not noticed, till he lurched against a chair and nearly fell. George and I rose at once, and placed our hands on the backs of the ladies' chairs—you can guess which chairs we chose—and the girls rose and left the room. Morland said nothing, but attacked his food sullenly, and it was not until George and I rose to go that he spoke.

"You think that you have beaten me, do you, Doc? Well you have this time! and I can take a beating as well as any man," (and I thought of the sight of him crying in Clarke's boat, years ago, and of his race with Lidney at Port Macquarie, but I said nothing) "but wait till to-morrow or next day, see?" and he wagged his head in affected sapience. . . . And the ever-recurring question re-asserted itself, "what does he know? what is his hold over her?" and I asked the question of George.

"I don't know," he answered.

"Does Miss Muffet?" I asked.

"No!"

"Sure?"

"Quite!" answered George, "she asked me if I could imagine what it was."

"Miss Durston has lent or given him money?"

"Yes, at Port Macquarie."

"Well, I'm going to get rid of him to-morrow, George: I would do it now, but he's drunk. Besides Miss Durston has asked me to let him come with us as far as he wants. But he will not want after to-morrow."

"You couldn't go beyond Miss Durston's wish?"

"Not her expressed wish, old man. But to-morrow, sometime, he will abandon our company or I shall have been knocked silly."

"Can I be of any help?"

"Thanks, no! I'm alone in this, but I might be glad of your help after our scrap is over!" and I laughed.

The ladies now came from their room, where they had finished their dinner, and telling them to be ready for an early start, I was about to bid them "Good night" when Miss Durston said:

"Would you mind very much, Dr Perry, if I invited two babies to come with us as far as Maitland?"

"Babies?" I said in surprise.

"Two little boys," said Miss Durston, smiling at my look of consternation, "they came in the mail coach, and their mother and aunt are distracted at the prospect of to-morrow's coach

journey to Maitland, where they live. They are dears," she added, "but life inside a small coach does not seem to agree with them."

"How old are they?" I asked.

"Three and a half, and one and a half," answered Miss Durston.

"I was only thinking of the commissariat," I explained, "let us have them by all means, I suppose they are asleep now?"

"Yes, Miss Muffet and I put them to bed; the two ladies are worn out."

"The only difficulty I foresee is in reference to milk," I said, "but no doubt we shall be able to get some on the way," and Miss Durston and Miss Muffet retired to make the necessary arrangements.

I must remember to tell you that I took a snap of the mail coach arriving here just after we did; I hope it prints well, because I took the picture as the sole outside passenger was descending from his precarious-looking seat on the top of His Majesty's mails. . . . I feel as though I might sleep to-night, so good night, Amy dear,

Your loving brother,

Aston.

CHAPTER XI

West Maitland, *Dec. 1st, 1909*

My dear Amy,

I am writing from West Maitland, where we are making a midday stop of three hours, for there is plenty of time. Where was I? I had just gone to bed at Stroud, hadn't I? Well, I went to bed but not to sleep, and after tossing about for an hour or so, I filled my pipe, and finding a comfortable chair on the verandah, smoked until I fell asleep, and woke, stiff and cold, at two o'clock. As I stretched my cramped limbs, and yawned luxuriously with arms outstretched, I saw in the window of the opposite house a sudden light come and go, as though someone had struck a match to learn the time; in fact, I muttered this to myself, and then the thing occurred again, only that the light lasted longer, and my curiosity was aroused. And when it happened a third time I became very wide-awake, and hastily

slipping on my shoes, I was stealing out again, when I thought that George would never forgive me if this should prove an adventure, and I had left him out of it; and in any case, I knew that if it proved to be nothing, George would be asleep again in ten minutes. So I woke him, and telling him to put on his shoes, we went out together to the verandah. "And we'll take this!" I cried, melodramatically brandishing Miss Durston's revolver. "Watch that window!" I said to George, who looked as though he thought I had gone out of my mind, and no wonder! and even as I spoke the light came and went.

"Has that happened before?" asked George.

"I saw it three times before I called you," I replied.

"If it occurs again, we might have a look at him through the window," said George, "I wonder why he didn't pull down the blind? But of course," he added, as we stole across the road, "it may be a lunatic who spends his nights striking matches."

"It might be a lot of things," I said, rudely, "we'll soon see what it *is*." If George felt as foolish as I did, as we tiptoed to that window, there was a lot of foolishness in the main street of Stroud at that moment! We got as near the

window as we could; the blind had been drawn down to within a foot of the bottom, and my nose was pressing the pane, but we could see nothing. As we acknowledged this to each other with a look, the light sprang up again, and we peeped in immediately, ducked our heads as though we had seen the muzzle of a gun. What we had actually seen was a man, kneeling with his back towards us before an open safe! Still crouching, quite unnecessarily, we moved round to the side of the house which was in the shadow of the waning moon.

"What shall we do now?" I asked, laughing silently.

"Get in, and knock him on the head," suggested the poet and dreamer.

"Yes!" I replied sarcastically, "and get stuck up here for a month as murderers, or at least as witnesses; that wouldn't suit me a little bit."

"Nor me!" responded George, ruefully.

"Any alternative suggestion?" I inquired, smiling.

"Wait till he comes out and bag him."

"Same objection," I said.

"Inform the police!" said George, with an air of finality.

"You don't know the police as intimately as I

do," I returned, " by the time Chief Constable O'Flaherty had taken down our names, addresses, occupations, religions and what not, Mr Burglar would be miles away with his booty. The only thing that the police do thoroughly is to harass the drivers of motor-cars! "

" Let's have another look at him? " suggested George.

" Very well, you go and look, while I stay by this door," for I had found that the door near where we stood was ajar. Nothing happened for a few moments till George came back and whispered excitedly :

" He's coming! Oh, let me tackle him! "

" Let him alone, you blood-thirsty poet," I exclaimed; and we stood silent, for we heard stealthy footsteps and the creaking of boards. He seemed an experienced and callous burglar, for as he came out of the house, he just glanced casually to right and left, up and down the street—we were in deep shadow, and he did not see us—and with his sack over his shoulder, stepped briskly across the road, towards the yard entrance of the hotel. As soon as he had disappeared we hurried across, too, but, going round to enter the hotel-yard from the back, got bushed for a minute or two, and reached the yard from

the rear just in time to see our friend the burglar turning The Locust's starting handle! George began to run towards him, about fifty yards separated us, but I held him back. I couldn't believe that the man would be able to get away with my car, and I did not want to be mixed up with a police court case if I could avoid it.

"Fire off the revolver!" suggested George, excitedly, but I dragged him behind the wood-heap which was concealing us from the thief, and said:

"And wake the whole township!"

"But we must do *something*, man! Look!" Sure enough, the man had got the engines started, in a moment he was in the driver's seat, and the grate of the engaging clutch sounded, as, with throttle closed down, the car moved away as silently as might be.

"Great Scot!" I cried—there was no need for silence now, and with George a yard in front of me, we rushed after the disappearing car. But of course we were too late, for as we emerged through the yard gates, we saw The Locust, beginning to raise the dust, going Newcastlewards.

"The Ladybird! The Ladybird!" I cried, excitedly, "we'll race him by moonlight!" and I

laughed, it all seemed so weird a joke to me.

"I'll drive!" cried George, as he leapt to the driver's seat, "start her quick!"

"Can you?" I asked, surprised—George was coming out in new places!

"Yes, man! I have three cars at home, and one of them is a Melnote. Hurry up!" I had no time to express surprise at this news, for he had never even mentioned that he had a car! these silent men!

The Ladybird started up sweetly at the first turn, and with a jerk we began our stern chase. George put in the second and third speeds (she had four) in rapid succession, and we were out in the road in a moment or two, and turned to the left with a swerve that bumped me against him. Then I cried, "Stop!" and before he had time to obey my command, I was out and rushing back to the hotel verandah. For I had caught sight of a white-robed figure standing there. In that moment of intense excitement I recalled two lines of Eric Mackay:

"Alone, unseen, unlooked at by the Saints
Come thou to me with thy warm naked feet!"

"What is the matter?" she cried, her hands

pressed to her dear bosom, "I heard The Locust——" and my eyes took in her marvellous beauty under the light of the kind moon; her glorious hair in a great plaited rope against the whiteness of her gown:

"A burglar has borrowed The Locust," I said rapidly, "and we have taken The Ladybird to follow him. May we?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, quick!" she said, "but oh, Aston! do be careful!" and I snatched her hand to my lips in the madness of hearing her speak my name. But even in that great moment I remembered the impatiently waiting George, and I leapt back to my seat, my blood surging tumultuously through my body.

"Let her go!" I said, and George obeyed. The Locust was out of sight, of course, but the road was level and in fair order. She had perhaps four miles start of us, and we could easily do ten more miles in the hour than she, and, besides the burglar did not know that he was being followed, and I happened to know that The Locust's petrol would not carry her far, as I had told William not to fill up the tank. It was cold as we rushed along in the night air, for we were clothed only in pyjamas and shoes! George looked at nothing but the road in front, and how

he drove! and how the good Ladybird travelled! I laughed aloud in my excitement as we bumped along; but George uttered no sound, his gaze concentrated upon the track, his mind upon our quarry. Again I laughed, but this time in sheer delight at the sweet recollection of what I had but now left upon the hotel verandah . . . my Queen! . . .

"Shake her up!" I cried, tauntingly, laughing, as I clung on with both hands to prevent myself from being shaken out of my seat, and George spoke for the first time:

"Hope the differential holds out! got your revolver?" and I laughed again, brandishing it.

"There she is!" I cried, as we lurched over a bad bit of ground, and about half a mile ahead, I saw a cloud of dust, and a minute later the old Locust labouring through a soft newly made bit of road.

"Hold on!" cried George, as he steered The Ladybird with a vicious swerve to the side, to avoid the soft going in the middle of the road and for a long second we skimmed along on two wheels.

"Sound the horn!" I cried, "blow hard!" and "Roo-roo!" growled The Ladybird. The

burglar heard, for he started and looked over his shoulder, lost his grip of the wheel, and allowed The Locust to take a quarter circle turn to the right, the back wheels skidding through the thick dust road mendings, the cloud becoming impenetrable. George threw out the clutch and put the brakes on hard, and we slithered up to within a foot of our prize, which was now stationary at right angles to the road.

"Hands up!" I shouted, as I levelled Miss Durston's revolver at the man; indeed, I was so foolishly jubilant that I fired one chamber, aiming wide, and the little bullet flew with a ping into the bush. The man's hands shot up at that, and, as coolly as you please:

"What stopped my jolly engine?" he said, only he didn't say "jolly."

"Petrol petered out," I answered. He and I were now standing in the road, facing each other: "Never thought of that!" he said, "came away in too much of an 'urry!" and before I could say "Knife" he was upon me! the revolver went flying wide as I fell bang on my back with the unexpected burglar on my chest, and his hands at my throat. But the struggle was not for long; he was a stocky little man of near fifty, and I weigh fourteen stone, and am thirty-five years of

age. I wrenched his hands from my throat, and, turning suddenly, reversed our positions, while George sat looking on.

"What next?" asked my adversary, imperturbably, "say, Mister, you're hurting my wrists!" and I laughed.

"Interview with the prisoner," I said, "after he has been firmly secured. Hand me some rope from The Locust's tool-box, George, and then pick up the gun."

"I saw this chap in the bar, this evening, drinking with Morland," George said as he handed me the rope.

"Very likely," I answered—"a beast and his friends!" The burglar was silent as I tied his wrists and ankles, using surgical knots. And then: "They're terrible tight, Mister," he said. "Is the stuff yours?" he inquired, inconsequently.

"No!" I answered, "nor yours, now!"

"That's true enough!" he said, "and I never had a softer job, who'd a thought——"

"How many convictions against you?" I asked. George and I had hoisted him into the body of The Locust by this, and arranged him as comfortably as the narrowness of his quarters permitted: fortunately he was short.

"This'll be my fifth," he answered brightly, and even grinned: he was a cheerful burglar!

"H'm!" I said, "do you generally plead 'Guilty.'"

"When I'm caught like this, I do," he answered, as though it were a monthly occurrence: "Could you loosen this 'ere cord round my ankles, Mister, it's (jolly) tight."

"Yes, I could," I said, "but I don't think I will just now, for you see I'm going to drive with my back to you." For meanwhile George had been transferring some of The Ladybird's petrol to The Locust's tank.

"Turn The Ladybird, George," I said, "and let me pass you, I've got an experienced and slippery passenger on board." Acting upon my suggestion—it was wonderful how quickly he had subsided into his normal silent self—George started The Ladybird, backed and turned her, and then started The Locust's engine, and I drove on steadily while he followed far enough behind to be out of my dust. My precaution was justified, for when we reached the hotel yard, we found that the burglar had managed to get his hands loose, and was plucking violently at his ankle cords. I re-adjusted his bonds, almost wishing that he had been able to make his escape.

As we had passed the verandah front, I had seen Miss Durston and Miss Muffet, fully dressed, and had waved a victorious hand to them.

"Get along and re-assure the ladies, George," I said, "and tell William I want him. What's the time?"

"I'll go and see," said George: "a quarter to three," he said when he returned: the whole event had occupied only three-quarters of an hour, but in another forty-five minutes we should have to be off.

"Ask them to be ready in half an hour," I said, (for I knew that Miss Muffet would need fifteen minutes' grace)—"we've got to get out of this town mighty sharp. Ask Miss Durston to try to get the two kiddies aboard asleep—I think that's all. I've got to settle with our felonious friend here." And George departed.

"Now then!" I said to the man—I had taken care that he did not hear my words to George, indeed, we had spoken in whispers—"Now then! Mr Burglar, what am I going to do with you?"

"Wish I knew, Mister! but that there dust 'as made me uncommon thirsty!"

"Water any use to you?" I asked.

"If so be that there's nothing else," he

answered, with a wink. So I gave him a drink of water, strengthened. I was rather ashamed of doing it, but I had to humour him, and it seemed to me that it might be his last taste of whisky.

"You're a (jolly) gentleman, you are, Mister, though I say it!" was my reward, as I let his head down. "I say, governor!" he said suddenly, changing his mode of address with the access of spirits induced by the slackening of his thirst, "what are you going to do with me? that's a pretty little gun o' yours!" he added reminiscently.

"How many years are you likely to get for this job?" I asked.

"It's a lifer, Mister, and no bloomin' error," he answered, grinning, "he said it would be, las' time."

"Who?" I asked.

"Old——" he said, mentioning a well-known name, "and I druv his motor for two months, too."

"So that's how you learnt to drive?" I said.

"'Is was an 'Umber, too," he replied, elliptically.

"I suppose it's *not* much use asking you to promise anything?"

"Not much, Mister! you see it's been my living for thirty year and more."

"Well, look here, man! you've got brains," I suggested.

"Not enough, seemingly," he answered, grinning, "caught in the (jolly) act; I suppose you seen me come out of the 'ouse?"

"We did," I answered, "we watched you filling your sack."

"Cripes!" he remarked, "you don't 'appen to 'ave a chaw of terbaccar about you, Mister?"

"Afraid not," I said, "try this!" and I handed and lighted for him a cigar. He leant back and puffed at this contentedly for a minute, while I conferred with William, who had come up, and who expressed no surprise at what he saw.

"Wish I 'ad never seen your bloomin' car," the man muttered. "Say, Mister! this yere cigar is fallin' out," and it fell as he spoke, "if you was to cut a bit of it off, like, it would chew all right," and I attended to his request, while he went on, talking with his mouth full. "If I 'adn't seen your (jolly) car, and known it fer an 'Umbler, I'd have been four miles away by this time, and no (jolly) ropes round me ankles, neither." I was afraid he was getting morose, and time was passing.

"Was it an empty house?" I asked.

"C. P. S." (Clerk of Petty Sessions) "bachelor, gone visitin'," he said. "Wish I 'ad never seen your (jolly) car!" he repeated. He was certainly losing his cheerful manner! George rejoined us now, dressed, explaining that he had been so long because of the difficulty of waking William. And I sympathised with him. William grinned proudly.

"Help me get him out!" I said, and together we hoisted the man out, and I took him in my arms and carried him across to the burgled house, George following with the sack. Here I laid him as comfortably as might be, on the floor, with a cushion under his head. I looked at his ankle-cords; they were quite secure; and then I untied his wrists, and after allowing a short interval for circulation, I tied them again behind his back. I hated doing it, but I couldn't do less. For after all is said and done, a J.P. has his duties. . . .

"Listen!" I said to him, "you haven't much reason to be grateful to us, but you will be doing us a great favour if you say nothing as to how you were caught."

"Give's another drink, Mister!" was his reply.

"More haste, less speed," I thought, and "get

him a drink from The Locust's tool-box," I said to George, and George went.

"Is it any use asking you to promise?" I asked.

"Not much, Mister! but I'll do it!" and with that I had to be content. George came back with the drink, and having administered this, and thanked (!) the man and bid him "Good-bye," we left him, and walked back quickly to the hotel. I dressed as quickly as I could, and found the girls waiting for us, the "babies" being asleep in The Locust.

"Oh, Dr Perry, d-do tell us it all over again!" cried Miss Muffet, "Mr Lidney has told us your part," (Oh, George! did William take so long to wake?) "you tell us his" (shrewd girl).

"Presently," I said, smiling, "I have a letter to write."

"A letter!" she cried, "at this hour of the morning! You're always writing letters!"

"To the local constable," I explained.

That functionary must have received the surprise of his life when he read my letter! I slipped it under the front door of his residence. "Sir," it said, "in the corner house, occupied by the C. P. S. facing the hotel, if you go quickly, you may find something to your advantage." It

was of course, unsigned, but I subscribed it with the initials "J.P." . . . I wonder if he went?

I saw William before we started, and instructed him to do his best to-day to keep Morland sober—"Take as long as you like between the townships," I said, "and stop at Maitland, East Maitland, only just long enough to get a meal. Carry some food with you." "Yes, sir," he said, and having started *The Locust* for us, no doubt went back to bed. He is very much awake when awake, but I never met anyone with his power of sleeping soundly. It was a quarter to four before we were off, George sitting by me, and the two girls in the body, each nursing a boy, Boppo sniffing in jealous curiosity at them. The girls had managed, between them, to put dressing gowns over the children's sleeping suits—they had slept in the same room with them—and a small dress-basket contained their day-clothes.

I cannot say too often that the early morning is the best part of the day—he who suggested the daylight saving bill was a hygienic genius—and this morning we felt more than ever the exhilarating effects of the cool dawn. We were very silent, for even if I spoke in an undertone to George, Miss Muffet's "Hush!" sounded

from behind us, and I had to laugh even in a whisper. . . . But I did not want to talk; now that I had time to think my own thoughts, I found them very pleasant! "In her pretty nightie," they ran, "and she let me kiss her little hand, and called me by my Christian name." . . . Why should I not? And there came to my mind a verse of one of George's early songs:—

"Where shall I get me, where may I hide
 To still my desire?
 For my love is as deep as the wide world is wide,
 And as quenchless as fire." . . .

We saw the sun rise for the third time together, but we didn't take much notice of it, at least I didn't, for I had other less daily occurrences on my mind; the girls were too much taken up with watching their charges; Boppo was asleep; and George didn't seem to be caring whether the sun rose or set! . . . We were a strange company! Suddenly there was a loud wail as "Baby" awoke and, finding himself in such very unexpected quarters, howled aloud, waking Mervyn, who, for a while, joined in the chorus. But the girls were quite happy; they bustled in their narrow quarters, and soon had the youngsters dressed and smiling. "Baby" had a bottle (and as Miss Muffet would call this a "boppo," our

Boppo showed great signs of excitement), and Mervyn some dates and "bup" (bread and butter); Baby kept his eyes on these more solid substances of nutriment while drinking, and immediately he had finished, stretched out his hand to his brother, crying "Mine!" and he got some dates, too . . . I hope there is a good children's doctor in Maitland. . . . We breakfasted heartily at a little inn at Booral where I distinguished myself by eating four (Miss Muffet says five) eggs and asking for more; but the stock being exhausted, I had to go hungry! During the meal, at Miss Muffet's repeated request, I gave my version of the burglar episode, interrupted every now and then by "O wait till I wipe Mervyn's face!" or "Just a moment while I wipe up this milk," and so on. And when I had finished, Miss Muffet said, "But what did he mean by saying that Judge ——'s car was a 'number two'?" I left her guessing. . . .

On again to Raymond Terrace and across the Hunter River, on—my thoughts still dwelling upon the beautiful vision of the early moonlit morning. . . . "Baby" was getting sleepy (Mervyn was quite content to lie quietly in Miss Muffet's plump arms, munching dates), and Miss Durston was crooning him to sleep. She has a

gentle, soft voice that would send any baby to sleep, and ours was no exception. . . . Ours? . . . Ah! Amy, if I could tell you how I felt when I wrote that word! . . . I glanced back and saw "Baby" lying with his head pillowed against Miss Durston's breast . . . and my heart was filled with unspeakable longing. . . . She was half singing, half crooning a lullaby which I had not heard before. As she began I noticed that George gave a start, but I was so intent upon listening to Miss Durston that I said nothing. I caught the words, for though she sang very softly, they were quite distinct. Is it very pretty, or am I letting my love run away with my literary judgment? These are the words, which I copied at Miss Durston's dictation afterwards:—

"If I were your Baby and you were my Mother,
 sweet,
 What should I do?
 I should do just as you do!
 Hush-a-bye, Baby, hush!
 I should curl up my toes
 Under the clothes,
 And crinkle my nose,
 And say Boo-oo-oo!
 Just as you do!
 Hush-a-bye, Baby, hush!

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If you were my Mother, and I were your Baby,
dear,

What would you do?

Hush-a-bye, Baby, hush!

Would you give me a kiss

Like this and like this?

Would you feel the same bliss

My little boy blue,

As when I kiss you?

La-loo-lala-loo

Hush-a-bye, Baby, hush!

If I were your Baby, and you were my Mother,
sweet,

What should I do?

I should do just as you do!

Hush-a-bye, Baby, hush!

With my pretty head pressed

To Mother's soft breast

I should drop off to rest!

La-loo-lala-loo

Just as you do!

Hush-a-bye, Baby, hush!

Is it any wonder that "Baby" was asleep when Miss Durston had sung the song once? and Mervyn, too? But I was glad that she sang the last verse again. . . .

"What a very pretty lullaby," I said, half turning.

"It is a great favourite of mine," she answered.

"Who wrote it?" I asked,

"I don't know his name, or her name," she said, smiling, "it is signed with initials only, G. L."

"G. L.!" I cried in astonishment, and stopped the car. "Do you mean to say you don't know who 'G. L.' is?" I asked.

"Shut up, Aston!" said George, under his breath.

"No," replied Miss Durston, looking surprised at my vehemence.

"Why have you stopped the c-car?" asked Miss Muffet, to create a diversion, and looking very hot and uncomfortable, and "Oh, do shut up, old man!" in an agonised voice from George.

"Do you mean to tell me, Miss Muffet, that you haven't told Miss Durston who 'G. L.' is?"

"No!" she answered, "who said that a girl couldn't keep a secret?" (*I hadn't*).

"This is 'G. L.' Miss Durston," I said, and I touched George's shoulder with the point of my finger; then I turned on the switch, the engines responded, and The Locust moved on; and I left the ladies to fix up things between them. . . . "Baby" was still asleep when we drove up to his and Mervyn's home, and the children were reluctantly given up to the charge of an astonished nurse. . . .

Having found an hotel—where there are many it is not so easy as where there is only one!—I established George in charge of the ladies and went out. I had to call at the Post Office for a parcel which I expected from Brisbane, for which I had written from Tweed Heads, a parcel containing George's birthday present for to-morrow; and that they might understand my absence, I explained it to the ladies. I was on my way back with this, when, in a side street, I met a girl of eight or so, hurrying along and crying bitterly. No one knew me in the place, so I stopped and asked her what the matter was. I had some difficulty in understanding her for her sobs, but made out the cause of her distress.

"I've lost my collar and brooch," she said, "teacher has sent me to look for it—mother will beat me if I don't find it!"

"How did you lose it? Don't cry!" I said.

"It dropped off; I had it on when I left home," she answered.

"Was it a nice collar?" I asked, and her sobs began to lessen with the interest of talking to someone about her trouble.

"Yes," she replied, "Mother got Miss Jennings to make me two, 'cause when she came to make our summer dresses, Mother was sick, and when

she had finished them it was only three o'clock, so Mother said, 'you might make some collars for Madge out of this,' and I've lost the best one!" and the howling recommenced.

"Don't cry," I said, "I know a shop where they sell lovely collars, let's go and look if they have one like yours?" The child hesitated at first, and her pathetic sobbing was resumed.

"Mother will beat me if I don't——" but I took her hand, and led her into the main street. "And it was a lovely brooch," she said, "gold, too! Father gave it me for Christmas, and I've only wore it three times!"

"Never mind, Madge," I said, "here's the shop I told you about," (it was, of course, the first time I had set eyes upon it) "let's go in and see if we can find a collar like yours." In a moment the child, the woman-to-be, became animated, and she had to look at three hundred and fifty collars, (more or less) before she had made her selection. The cost was half a crown! How very little is required to dry young tears! She was now as proud as Judy, and marched out of the draper's shop and into the jeweller's. ("Not that one!" She had counselled, "there's a better one further along)," as though it were an everyday occurrence. Youth is very adaptable.

The brooch took even longer than the collar to select, for there were so many beautiful things to look at; and I took advantage of this to make some purchases on my own account; but at last it was pinned on, and paid for, and a very happy girl said: "Thank you, sir," rather shyly, as we turned to go out. And near the door were Miss Durston and Miss Muffet sitting with their backs to the counter, watching us! I wondered how long they had been there, and felt like a criminal caught in the act, and much more ashamed than our burglar friend had appeared to be!—and was quite relieved when Miss Muffet cried:

"Go away, Dr Perry, this is secret!"

"Where's Mr Lidney?" I asked, "I left him in charge of you."

"Oh, he's outside," said Miss Muffet calmly, and turned to interview a returning shopman, waving her hand to me in dismissal. George was waiting.

"Are you a doctor?" asked my little friend.

"Yes," I answered.

"Our doctor's name is Solly," she said, "he brought Mother a *lovely* baby boy last Tuesday; Joe said he didn't want a baby brother, he wanted a teddy-bear, but I like babies best!" And so we parted, she going back with smiling face to

school, and I, after a word with George, back to the hotel. And here I am, after spending two solid hours writing to you, my dear sister. . . . I hope you have read it all? Good-bye, for we must start in a few minutes, if we are to reach St Albans in decent time to-night. Morland hasn't shown up, and no doubt William is engineering his journey satisfactorily.

Your loving brother,

Aston.

CHAPTER XII

St Albans, *Dec.* 1st, 1909

My dear Amy,

I am tired, but very wideawake—do you know the feeling? I have had a very strenuous day, and have a good deal to tell you, more, indeed, than I shall have time for to-night, and I posted a long letter to you from West Maitland!

“What were you doing in the jeweller’s shop?” I asked Miss Muffet, as we were boarding The Locust.

“Who was that little girl?” she countered.

“Her name is Madge,” I said, “and she has a brother Joe, and Joe prefers teddy-bears to baby-brothers, but Madge likes babies best!”

“Girls always have the best taste,” returned Miss Muffet, “but who was she?”

"Her name is Madge," I said gravely, "and she has a brother Joe, and Joe prefers——"

"Oh, that's enough!" cried Miss Muffet, "if you won't tell us, you won't!" and she pouted her pretty mouth.

On again, steadily towards the end, past little Wollombi and to the left by little Laguna, beyond which we halted and had afternoon tea by the roadside; tea and tea-cake, cream cakes and fruit; for might it not be our last out-of-doors meal together? Then on again along the mountain side with patches of rich cultivation on our left, and the recurrent joke of "Where is Dean's Farm?" which always seems to be "this one" or "the next one to this," and finally appears when not expected: through the two notorious sandy-bedded creeks where the owner of the bull awaits the passing of the motor-car, hoping that it may stick in the treacherous sand, so that he may earn his reward after the bull has drawn it out! Then up, and ever up, over sandy track and stone, and still up, round curves with fearsome precipices yawning on our right, and still up till on either hand there seems to stretch limitless ranges after ranges, as though all the world were mountains, their colours dimmer with the distance to the faintest blue of the farthest off

Mount Manning; I think the grandest bit of scenery on the journey. Now a great angry thunderstorm swooped down upon us, not unprepared; for the intense heat of the afternoon had warned us of its coming. At first with heavy patter of large rain-drops, then, with a suddenness that was startling, the great flash and crash came together, deafening us, and rolling away in diminishing echoes, beyond the ranges: and then for ten minutes it rained, "teemed" as Australians call it, seriously and determinedly, until the sun, a little tired after his day's work, came out again, and, but for the better condition of the sandy track, and the collection of water at the roadside, there might never have been any storm at all. The Locust had passed through it unconcernedly, glad to get so good a chance to cool its radiator, and so vertical had been the down-pour, that, protected by the hood above, I had not needed to put on my rain-coat. Now down, coasting gloriously round sudden bends, ever with that hungry-looking gulf on our right, down and down, our lungs filled with the exhilarating mountain air, our spirits exulting in the delight of rapid movement, caring nothing what to-morrow might bring, so that we had to-day! As we neared the foot of the range, I said to Miss

Durstun, who was at my side, nursing Boppo.

"If I lived in Sydney, I should want to do this every week-end!"

"It is very beautiful!" she replied, "but does it not seem a pity to rush it so? Would it not be more enjoyable to take it all slowly?"

"It does, and it would be," I answered, "but The Locust does not like crawling down-hill!"

"I am not criticising your driving, Dr Perry," she said, smiling, "but I should like to come again some time in the early morning, on our way to breakfast."

"Our way?" I questioned.

"Yes, why not?" she replied, "I should not like to think that we shall never motor again together; of course it is most unlikely that we shall, but yet. . . ."

"But yet?" I prompted.

"But yet—it is not very probable, is it?" and I wondered what had been the original ending of her sentence; "so let us enjoy this, our last evening, as we may."

"Our last evening!" I protested; but she only nodded her head, and looking, I saw that her lovely eyes were full. . . . I pressed the little

hand that lay on Boppo's head—what cared I if Miss Muffet's sharp eyes saw? I believe they did, and I started when she said:

"How far now, Dr Perry? I'm getting hungry!"

"After all that cake?" I bantered.

"You needn't mention cakes, Dr Perry, or I shall have something to say about eggs!"

"Well, here we are!" I said, as the prettily situated township came in sight with its stream and bridge, its surrounding mountains, and great cedar trees.

"What a high bridge, and what a tiny river!" said Miss Muffet.

"They do not appear to match, do they?" I said, "but look where the old bridge was, and how little there is left of it!" And I pointed to the remains of one end of the old bridge, which had evidently been washed away in some previous flood.

"It must be a great sight, a river like this in flood," remarked George.

"It is," I answered, "I could tell you some amusing and serious yarns about Queensland floods."

"Tell us now!" said Miss Muffet.

"Another time!" I answered, "I thought you

were hungry? You go and get ready for dinner, it will be ready in twenty minutes—it always is!”

We had hardly shut off petrol when The Ladybird came tearing along in a great tornado of dust, and pulled up with a slither and jerk upon the grass behind The Locust, under the great cedar trees. A wide grin was on William's face, and John gave a sigh of relief, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. But Morland! He was white and trembling, and staggered a little when he alighted.

“My God!” he cried, “My God!” shaking his fist at William's broadening grin, “I'd horse-whip you if you were my servant! I'm d——d if ever I sit behind your (jolly) driving again, you, you——” and he spluttered for want of a word to express his pent-up feelings, and turning his back to us, entered the bar.

“Did you travel, William?” I asked.

“We left Maitland at four,” he answered.

“Whew!” I whistled, “where did the storm catch you?”

“We missed it, sir, we were crawling up the range on our second at the time.”

“D-didn't the n-neighbourhood of the m-mountains affect the m-magneto?” asked Miss

Muffet, stammering more than usual; but William's only reply was a grin.

"How did you like it, John?" I asked.

"I liked it pretty well, sir, thank you," and he touched his cap, (William never does) "except when the offside wheels was spinning round with nothin' under 'em but a great hole full of trees. William's a fair terror to drive!"

"There's not much you can teach me about William," I said, "what was your hurry?" I asked, addressing him.

"It was Mr Morland, sir, he kep' chivvying me to shake her up, and he said things about my driving, sir."

"Such as?" I asked.

"Well, he won't say 'em again, sir. He said I would look better on a coster's cart with a donkey between the shafts." And William turned red! It rankled still.

"Nice spoken gentleman, isn't he, William?"

"Yes, sir!" said William, himself again.

"So you gave him a specimen of your driving?"

"I let her go coming down the range, sir!"

"Good, William!" I said, "so long as there's no harm done to the car. How about the differential?"

"I chanced that, sir. She held all right."

"Yes, but remember to-morrow that it's not my car—or yours," I added, "whatever happens, The Ladybird must reach Sydney whole."

"Yes, sir! And will I have Mr Morland again?"

"No!" I answered. And it was good to see the relief and surprise blended on William's face. . . .

I wonder if you know why Australian men-servants don't touch their caps? The explanation is worth giving. In the very early Australian days when labour was more scarce even than now, the better-behaved convicts were let out to work on the sheep-stations, and one of the regulations issued to them was, that whenever they met a gentleman they must touch their caps. The result was that all other-than-convict labourers learnt to omit this mark of respect, or servility as they would call it nowadays, in order that they might not be mistaken for ticket-of-leave men.

When Morland joined us at the dinner-table, (eggs and corned beef and tea) he began at once upon the enormities of William and his reckless driving, till we wearied of him, and I hinted that the expression of his fears in the hearing of

the ladies was not wise; and Miss Muffet snorted!

"Oh, trust you!" he cried angrily, "you and your bally grasshopper! There's too much hanging to it to let *you* run any risk!"

"What do you mean?" I asked, angry in my turn; for the sneering emphasis which he placed on the "you" made my blood boil.

"What do I mean?" he answered violently, "I mean that you wouldn't be game to take your old bone-shaker out of its gait if you were by yourself, but when you've got five thou' a year with you——"

"Stop!" I cried, burning with rage, and before he could say more the two girls rose and left the room, George going with them, and also Boppo, reluctantly, for he had been growling under his breath all the time that Morland was speaking.

Morland didn't say any more after they had had gone, and I let him finish his meal, while I smoked a pipe to settle my temper, for I wanted to keep cool for the next act. I managed to keep him from the bar when he had finished, and induced him to smoke a pipe (my tobacco!) with me outside, saying that I wanted to have a talk with him.

"What is it?" he asked insolently.

"Finish your pipe!" I replied. I wanted no unfair advantage, though I might need it! He must be comparatively as fit as I, when the tussle came. So we smoked in silence, till his action of knocking the ashes out against a post told me that the moment had arrived.

"Come down to the river-bank," I suggested, and I had a queer nervous sensation just above my belt, as I felt that the curtain was rising!

"What for?" he asked, "this is good enough for me!" and he stretched himself out in his squatter's chair.

"Come!" I said, standing over him, and somewhat to my surprise, he obeyed.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked me when we had descended the steep river-bank, and stood on the sandy shore, out of sight of anyone.

"I'll tell you!" I said, facing him, and all my nervousness went. . . . I am going to write this down as nearly as I can as it happened, Amy—you may skip it if you like, but I know that James, to say nothing of Roderick and Neville, will want to hear it all. . . .

"I'll tell you!" I repeated, speaking slowly.

"You have to clear out; we have suffered your company too long; and the question I want to put to you is, whether you will go with, or without, a licking?"

"Who's going to give it me?" he asked. And he laughed! He had pluck—a good man spoiled.

"I am!" I answered.

"You!" he sneered. "You!" and he looked me up and down.

"Yes, me!" I said; one reverts to one's early English at such moments.

"A bally lady's man, ladies' doctor!" he sneered, and laughed again.

"Take off your coat!" I said, and I took off mine, and my waistcoat, too. But as I stooped to lay the latter on the ground, he rushed me, and threw me sprawling on the sand, he rolling on top of me. I screwed round quickly—I can still do this, thanks to my football training—and was on my feet before he was, and we faced each other, panting a little. Then we began to fight. Warily at first, to get each other's measure; but presently the blows began. He got the first one in on my body (I can feel it now), and I let him have it back on his jaw. I knew that it would be wiser for me to concentrate my attention to his body, but I wanted to be quite fair—he was

not in such good condition as I—and can you believe it? I wanted very much to leave my mark unmistakably on his face. . . . My blow staggered him, and “God d——n you!” he muttered, “I’ll pay you for that!” and he almost did. For he came wildly at me, trusting to his great strength, and for some moments I had difficulty in avoiding his blows; one, indeed, on my cheek, drew blood and made it smart from a cut caused by his ring. But I wore him down, and when I had succeeded in getting in a left, and then a right, on his forehead and nose, “By God, it’s broken!” he said as he drew back.

“Enough?” I asked, and his answer was to rush at me again. I had settled down to it now, and, though I was breathing hard (not so hard as he), I was feeling a sense of, what shall I call it? primal physical pleasure! I clinched to avoid his rain of blows, and, my arms about his waist, I lifted him up and banged him down upon his feet, so that, his knees giving way, he fell, nearly dragging me with him. He was up again, quickly, and for a time we fought quietly, each regaining his breath. I felt that I could finish it now if I rushed him, for his breath had been coming in painful gasps, but it was that sense of

the delight of battle which held me back. I got one in on his nose again, and I felt it crackle, while his hand went up to it, and smeared the blood over his face. . . . I wondered if he were marked enough . . . but a bleeding nose can be cleaned up, I thought, black eyes show longer. So I suggested that he bathed his face, and that we took a spell. To my surprise he assented, and going to the river, washed his face and took a drink; and he removed his coat and waistcoat. Presently he faced me again, and without a word, we began to fight again. What his idea was, I don't know; I think it must have been the outcome of a sudden gust of rage, for after we had been sparring for a minute, he jumped in, and catching me by the waist, endeavoured to throw me. But I learnt to wrestle young, and I threw him easily. Again he rushed at me; his nose was bleeding afresh, and he looked dreadful in the dim light; there was no moon yet; and this time luck favoured him, for my foot slipped on a tussock of grass and we fell hard, he on top. He struck me once or twice on the face, at short range, before I had shaken him off and risen. . . . He suffered much in the next minute, for I landed two beauties, one on each eye, and the one on the right bunged it up; another I got

on his broken nose again. For his blows, when I was down, though I might be able to forgive him for them afterwards, had angered me. "My God!" he muttered, staggering, when my third smasher fell on his nose.

"Enough?" I asked, and I knew that my question must be very galling, but I wasn't caring at the time. He was breathing heavily, and could not last much longer.

"Enough?" he echoed—"you d——d money-hunter!"

"Will you go, now?" I asked; I was quite calm then; "or——" but he interrupted me.

"Go?" he cried, "yes, but I'll bash you first!" and once more he rushed in. But it was easy now; I stepped aside and landed one on the side of his face that sent him down. He was fuming with disappointed rage when he rose, and:

"Enough?" I asked again—and I meant it, I had had enough, at any rate.

"Enough?" he shouted, foaming, "when I've done with you, there won't be much of you left for your second-hand goods and her money-bags." And he struck at me again. For a moment I was dazed with wonder at the meaning of his last words, then grasping it, I saw red,

very, very red. . . . I cannot tell you what I did, for when I came to myself I was kneeling astride of him with my hands at his throat, and was banging his head up and down on the sand. It was George's voice that brought me back to sanity.

"He's had enough, old man, let him go!" the voice was George's, and his hand was on my shoulder, but the voice seemed to come from far away! I looked up, and George says that I said: "What's the bag?" George held one in his hand.

"Let go his throat!" he cried, (and he says that I was still mechanically lifting up and banging down Morland's head) and I looked and saw what I was doing, and that the poor beast's face was black. The sight of his face, almost unrecognisable as it was, must have taken me back for a moment, for, leaving his throat, I raised myself, and catching hold of him by the slack of his shirt and trousers, with a strength of which I would not have believed myself capable, I lifted him and swung him into the river. "Let the beast drown!" I said. . . . But fortunately for my freedom, George thought more wisely: he grasped the man's ankles, he was in shallow water, and dragged him out. His mouth was

full of bloodstained mud and muddy water, and he was a most pitiable spectacle, but he spluttered, so I knew that he was alive, though for the moment I didn't care much.

"What's the bag?" I said, stupidly, as taking in a deep breath, I seemed to regain my bearings.

"His belongings," answered George.

"Give it me!" and George handed it over, wondering, he told me afterwards, if I meant to throw it, too, into the river.

"I'm all right now, George old chap!" I said, for my senses seemed to have returned almost as quickly as they had gone: "get along back; I'll be with you in a few minutes," and, as he hesitated, I walked to my clothes, and putting them on, told him that I was "quite all right," and that I would call him if I felt it coming on again. My accompanying smile reassured him, and with a nod of his old head, he went.

Morland was now sitting up, spitting. He was a fearsome sight! One eye was closed, the other just sufficiently open for him to be able to see; his nose was perceptibly broken, and his clothes were dirty and drenched. He said nothing, but with great pain, rose to his feet, staggering. I helped him on with his clothes.

"Here's your bag," I said, "and here's a five-pound note," (he grasped this eagerly) "now clear out! and if ever you come within coo-ee of me again, I shall be quite ready to begin it all over." He said nothing, but walking unsteadily, made for the bridge in the direction of the Hawkesbury river, six miles away. . . . Poor devil! I'm glad that I let him have his dinner!

I washed myself in the river, George, who had come back when he saw Morland go, helping me, and bathed my head for a while, and soon felt about right. Except for the cut on my cheek which still bled a little, I was unhurt, but I felt pretty well shaken up and very tired. My collar was stained with blood, but I did not know this till I took it off. On the whole I had come off very luckily, for he was a strong man and had fought viciously. As we reached the top of the high river-bank, I could not fail to be struck by the still peacefulness of the scene, where a few minutes before, a few yards away, there had been so much turmoil!

"Leave me alone for a little, will you, old chap?" I said, "I want to collect my thoughts!" and George went away. I hope he found Miss Muffet. He deserved to! . . . I wanted to

think, for I had something more to do before I slept. . . . Looking round, I saw, away on the left, a small familiar figure, which brought back to my memory the downs of Port Macquarie, and hurrying towards it, was distressed to see Miss Durston sitting, her face buried in her tiny handkerchief, sobbing. In a moment I was at her side, kneeling, my arms about her:

"Enid, Enid, I love you, dear, don't cry!" I said.

"Oh, don't, don't!" she sobbed, and the sobs cut me like a knife, "you can't, you don't know!"

"I don't want to know!" I answered, stroking her glorious hair, "I know only that I love you, dear, and all I want to know is if you can care for me?"

"But you are hurt!" she said, irrelevantly, looking at my bloodstained face, and wiping it with the handkerchief that was wet with her dear tears.

"Only a scratch from a beast in the bush," I said, but I let her wipe it.

"Tell me!" she said.

"Morland," I explained, "I hit him and he hit me. I hit hardest and he's gone: he will never trouble you again . . . darling."

"Oh, thank God, thank God!" she said, "and

you!" and in a moment I had folded her in my arms and was whispering my love to her beautiful ears, and covering her hair and her eyes and her lips with my long pent-up kisses. . . .

"I love you, love you, oh, so much!" she murmured, as she gave her lips to mine . . . and little else mattered then . . . little else matters now . . . and I placed on her finger the ring which I had bought in Maitland, and for the thought of buying which I had to thank little crying Madge . . . and it fitted, and she kissed it. . . . Presently, beginning brokenly, but going on firmly to the end, though I asked her not to tell me now, she told her story . . . her sad, innocent story . . . it took her a long time, for there were interruptions . . . but she told it all . . . till "and then I met you,"—when folding her more tightly in my arms, I kissed her once again, and told her that I would protect her from all who might wish to harm her . . . and so we went back to the frowsy old beautiful hotel! Good night, Beloved . . . my Campaspe. . . .

Her story must wait! My eyes are heavy, now, for sleep. My room is upstairs. I am in the dining-room, and beyond this door which I can touch with my outstretched hand, Enid sleeps, Boppo guarding her closed door on the

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mat outside. Good Boppo, guard her safely . . . she will not need you long. . . . Good night Amy . . . but I must whisper another good night . . . hers must be the last. . . . My Queen and my Beauty!

Your loving brother,

Aston.

CHAPTER XIII

Orielton, Ocean Street,
Edgecliff, Sydney, *Dec. 2nd*, 1909

My dear Amy,

We were all up early this morning—I had two hours' sleep—and I woke with that delightful sense of blessedness which comes to one, now and then. . . . Enid was in the dining-room when I came down, and it gave me a great thrill of joy when she came to meet me with her beautiful face upturned to meet mine. . . . "It is true, then?" she whispered. . . . "Where are the others?" I asked presently, for George had left our room when I woke.

"Miss Muffet got up first," said Enid, "there was only room for one to dress at a time, and went out." Even as she spoke Miss Muffet came running in:

"Oh, Auntie!" she exclaimed, "the c-car's ready, and George has asked me to marry him! m-may I?"

"And if I say 'No'?"

"Oh, I shall marry him just the same! but you won't, will you?"

"No, dear, I won't! and I am very glad!" and they kissed. George had come in immediately after Miss Muffet, and passing him to come to me, she took his hand and placed its palm against her cheek, and then kissed it, in so pretty a way that George beamed his delight. Then I shook hands with him and Miss Muffet, and he with Enid, and I thought it was over for a time. I had forgotten Miss Muffet. She came right in front of me, and placing her hands on my shoulders, said:

"Thank you so, for b-bringing me George, Doctor."

"I?" I said, surprised.

"Yes," she answered, "I know you didn't do it on p-purpose, but you did it! and do you know what George said when I—when I said 'yes'?" and she blushed.

"No, but I think I can guess what he did!" I answered.

"Yes, he did that," she said simply and

proudly, as she put one hand behind, and squeezed his willing hand, "but he said he could not think how I could love him when you were—to be loved; that's how he put it," she said, proudly again.

"He did, did he? the scoundrel!" I exclaimed, trying to frown.

"Yes, and I said that I didn't love you a bit."

"Oh, indeed!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, and I d-don't!" she cried, "but I said that you were a dear—old—doctor," (with her hands on my shoulders she shook me gently with each word) "b-but I do love you all the same!"

"Well, of course," I answered, "you of all people might be expected to exercise the prerogative of woman to change her mind, but you're too late!"

"Why?" she asked, her eyes at their widest.

"I'm going to marry Id!" I replied. Miss Muffet stared at me for a moment still, and then:

"Oh, you darlings!" she exclaimed, and she kissed me hard and loud, then turning, the two dear girls went to each other's arms. . . . George gripped my hand and we stepped to the verandah.

"Where was it?" I asked.

"On the site of the fight!" he said, smiling.

"Good man!" I said, "you have wiped out the stain!"

"B-but listen!" interposed Miss Muffet, who had followed us out quickly, arms-round-waists with Enid, "how long have you two been engaged?"

"Eight hours," I answered, looking at my watch.

"It was last night then?" asked Miss Muffet.

"It was," I answered.

"And you never told me, Auntie! and I wondered why you were so quiet, and why you kissed me so lovingly!"

"You never told me who 'G. L.' was!" retorted Enid.

"Then we're quits; but n-never mind, we'll get married first, won't we, George?"

"Certainly—dear!" said old George, blushing.

"You'll have to hurry!" I said.

"Why?" asked Miss Muffet.

"Because I'm going to marry Id to-morrow!" I replied.

"Oh, are you?" said Enid, blushing divinely.

"Poor man!" exclaimed Miss Muffet.

"I think otherwise!" I said, "Id?"

"Yes, dear, if you wish," and I stooped and kissed her. Then I drew from my pocket the

other piece of jewellery which I had bought at Maitland, and telling Miss Muffet to shut her eyes, I clasped the chain round her neck. "Your engagement present," I said.

"Oh! what a p-perfectly beautiful pendant," she cried, "but how did you know? when——?"

"A little bird whispered!" I answered, and she was silent. . . .

"Where are we g-going to have breakfast?" asked Miss Muffet presently.

"At Wiseman's ferry," I answered, "come along!" Yet were we loth to leave this pretty place, sequestered among the hills, with the sun dispersing its morning mists, but William stood at The Locust's starting-handle, and John sat in The Ladybird's front seat.

"Where's the Beast?" whispered Miss Muffet.

"He had a telegram!" I answered.

"Oh, d-don't be silly," she cried, "t-tell me or I shall k-kiss you!"

"He's gone ahead," I replied hurriedly, "walking; truly he has! he and I had a few words last night, and I spoke last."

"Is this one of his words?" she asked, putting a finger on my bruised cheek.

"It is," I answered.

"Did you scratch his cheek?" inquired she.

"I broke his nose!" I answered, grimly.

"Oh, you d-dear man!" she cried, "where was it?"

"On the river-bank where you and George
——"

"I wish I had been there to see!" she cried.

"I'm glad you weren't," said George and I together.

"Why?" she asked.

"We were not pretty to look at—and he fell into the river," I said, as, helping Enid to the seat beside me, I took the wheel.

"Well, his clothes wanted washing!" remarked Miss Muffet, "and I am so glad the Beast has gone!"

"And I that the Beauty remains," I heard George whisper; and Id and I exchanged glances . . . yes little Miss Muffet is pretty, bless her! but. . . Well, I hope that you will see Enid before very long. . . . Boppo, of course, had taken possession of his mistress's lap, so off we started on the last day of our eventful cruise.

The drive of six or seven miles to Wiseman's Ferry is very pretty indeed, if mountain scenery may be so described; but I do not think that any one of us looked much at it, though we could

not fail to express our admiration for the beauty of the view of mountain and stream as we crossed the Macdonald River by hand-worked ferry-punt. There was a particularly fine echo here which George elicited by shouts of various kinds. George is coming on capitally! At the Hawkesbury crossing, our luck was out; for the first time we failed to strike the punt on the near side, and had to wait while it was fetched across for us. For the first time, too, The Locust and The Ladybird occupied the same punt together.

It was George's birthday, and my long-awaited-for plan was ready for execution. . . . Our hostess at Wiseman's ferry was a proud young mother, nursing her first-born after nine years of marriage, and she had a good meal ready for us in the customary twenty minutes. The obliging but careworn hostess of St Albans had given us a stirrup-cup of hot tea, but we were all hungry now. I kept George back for a moment to look at some imaginary fault in The Locust, and when he and I entered the breakfast-room, the fuse was laid. . . .

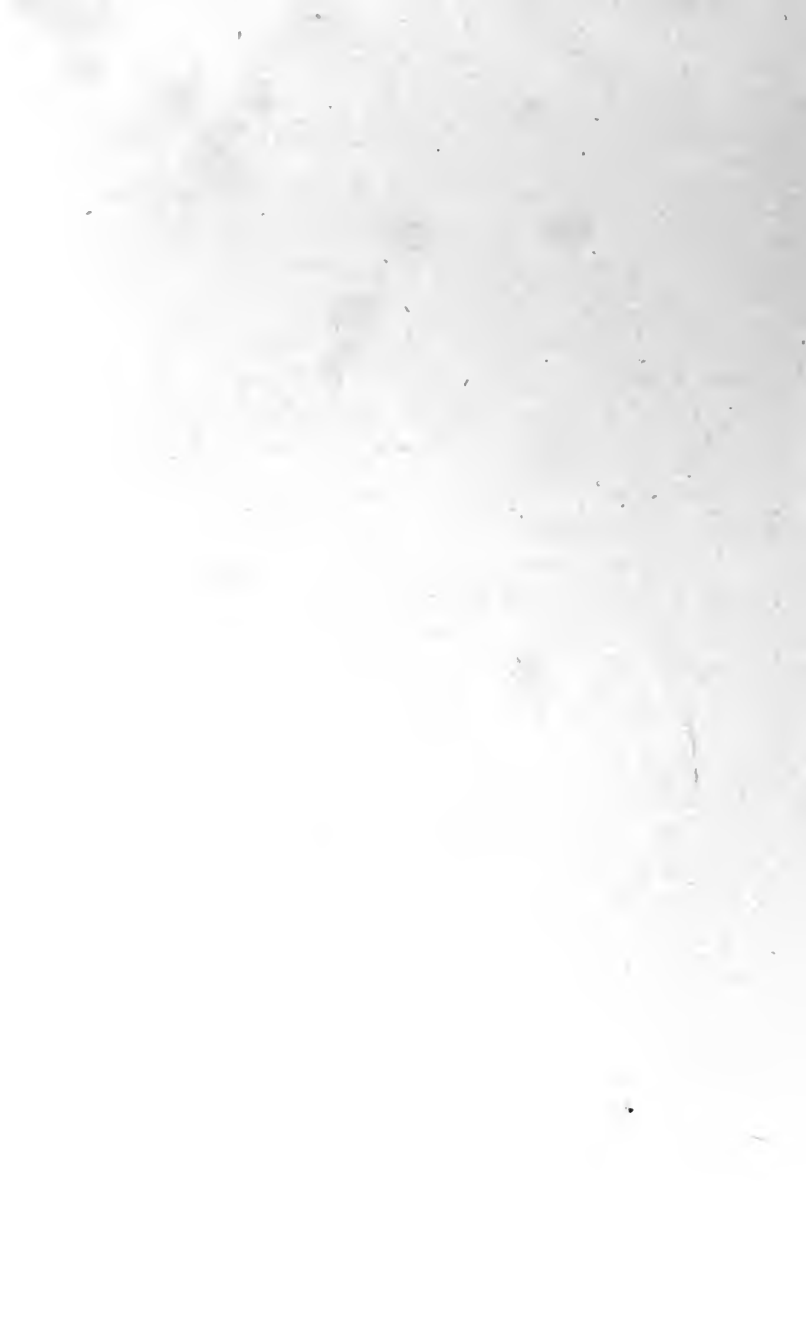
My parcel was on top, and he opened it first—a set of seven razors marked each with its day of the week; he smiled as he looked at them, and “No use to me!” he said, but his tone contra-



Wiseman's Ferry.



Orielton.



dicted the words. Then Enid's parcel was opened—a silver-mounted shaving brush, and a silver shaving-soap holder, fitted with soap. "How long have you two been engaged, really?" was his only comment. And. "These are as new to me as to you," I answered. With a glance at Miss Muffet, he began to unfold the paper of the box in which the third gift was wrapped; it took long and the eggs were getting cold; at last there was revealed a prettily-bound book of shaving papers, and a further parcel, which, unwrapped, became a very pretty silver candlestick, with engraved upon its base the words: "Ballinger Heads, Nov. 27th, 1909." He looked at this in silence, fondling it; then, before us all, he raised it to his lips, and gathering his parcels together, left the room. But as he passed Miss Muffet he placed his hand softly on her pretty head. "Don't wait for me," he looked back to say, and disappeared. . . .

"Is that why you were in the Maitland jeweller's shop?" I asked Miss Muffet.

"Yes," said she.

"He was pretty quick over the engraving," I said.

"He said it was impossible, at first," said Miss Muffet, smiling.

"But you persuaded him?"

"Yes."

"How?" I asked.

"Oh, just!" she said: and that was all the answer I got.

"Now perhaps you will tell us, I mean me, who that little Maitland girl was?" asked Miss Muffet.

"Her name is Madge," I said, "and she has a brother Joe, and Joe prefers teddy-bears——"

"Oh, you p-parrot!" she exclaimed, "but why were you buying brooches for her? how did you meet her?"

"How?" I echoed.

"Yes, how?" she cried.

"Oh, just!" I said.

"But who was she—Aston?" asked Enid in a few moments, and her hesitating utterance of my name was very sweet——

"Now we shall hear!" said Miss Muffet, triumphantly. . . . And they did.

George now re-appeared, shaven, clean-looking—and another man! He kissed Miss Muffet as he passed her, with a "Thank you, dear!" and "Oh, that's so much better!" in reply; then he gravely shook Enid's hand, with a simple "Thank you, Enid!" and nodding "Thanks,

old man," across to me, he attacked his food. . . . So after all I believe that it was the shaving-papers, more than the razors. . . .

"Now, if you please, Miss Muffet," I said, when the first edge was off my appetite, "may I have 'Songs and Sonnets'?"

"Oh, Dr Perry, p-please let me keep it till we reach Sydney, will you? George has promised me a copy of my own then!" Having given my consent to this proposal, Miss Muffet, who is bound to give George a few surprises before he is done with her, turned suddenly to him and said,

"Did you ever have a fight, George?"

"A fight!" he exclaimed, astonished.

"Yes," she said, and clenching her fists with thumbs sticking up, girl-fashion, she twirled them round and round each other.

"One!" said George.

"T-tell us about it!"

"It was rather funny," he said, reminiscently, "I undertook to fight three youths one after the other."

"Why?" asked Miss Muffet.

"Oh, no reason for it at all," said George, and I smiled. I knew.

"Why was it?" persisted Miss Muffet, and George took one of her hands in his and squeezed it.

"I'll tell you," he said. "My brother and I—it was sixteen years ago, I was seventeen," (and I saw Miss Muffet counting rapidly on her fingers!) "my brother and I had been to choir practice."

"Do you sing your songs, too?" Miss Muffet asked quite seriously.

"Not now!" said George, "but I had some sort of a singing voice in those days."

"The fight!" I said, looking at my watch.

"Oh! yes," said George. "There were five girls at the practice who might reasonably expect us to escort them home, and we decided that Tom, that's my brother, should take two of them, and I the other three, who were sisters. I don't suppose the girls ever had a more silent protector, for all I said was 'Good night,' three times, when we reached their gate. I was hot all the way with trying to think of something to say, and they giggled continuously. It was a great relief to me when I shut their gate and was free again. But I hadn't walked twenty yards

before I was met by a truculent youth who ostentatiously jostled me ; as I took no notice of this, in a swaggering voice he asked me what I meant by interfering between him and his pals, and their girls. ' You don't belong here anyway ! ' he said. ' I don't want your girls ! ' I said rudely ; but it was true, I really didn't ! and by-the-bye, I never attended choir-practice again. ' Well, you've got to fight us, anyway ! ' said the spokesman. ' All three ? ' I exclaimed, and I looked down the road to see what chance there was for a run. I could run in those days ! ' Me, first, anyway ! ' said this objectionable youth. ' All right, Mr Anyway, ' I said, and do you know, it was the irritation induced by the repetition of that word that brought about my decision ! And me, too ! ' And me ! ' chimed in the other two. ' All right, ' I agreed, ' but Mr Anyway first ? ' ' I'll teach you to call me names ! ' said my first-to-be adversary. I was in a horrible funk—please excuse the expression, Elsie ? " (" Elsie " squeezed his hand) " ' Where shall it be ? ' I asked. ' We know of a good place down here, ' said one of them. And we three, as solemn as you please, walked a quarter of a mile to the

'good place' in order to fight about nothing. I was ridiculously nervous, but the humour of the position struck me suddenly, and I laughed. 'You won't laugh long, anyway!' said my irritant-in-chief, and I thought he spoke the truth, for they were all bigger boys than I. Well, we arrived at the 'good place' and Anyway took off his coat in a business-like way. I kept mine on, for I thought even then that I might have to cut and run, and I didn't want to leave my clothes behind me. It was bright moonlight, and the fight lasted half a minute. He rushed at me like a bull, I stepped aside, he slipped and fell headlong, and not a blow struck! 'you tripped me!' he cried, as he got up, rubbing his elbow; 'I did nothing of the sort!' I answered angrily; 'you won't do it again, anyway!' he said—it was the last time he used the word, for its reiteration so pained my sense of literary proportion that it gave strength to my arm, though, at the same time it made me forget what they had taught me in the Gym, at Rugby; for he rushed wildly at me again, and instead of stepping aside, I met his rush with my fist right in his face; the impact hurt my knuckles like anything, and he fell like

a log and lay still! We gathered round him, friends and foe, and a cold chill gripped my heart or thereabouts, such as I had never felt before, and still he didn't move. 'Get up!' I cried, trembling with dread, and stooping over him. And to my intense relief he moved, and, 'Oh, my eye! Oh, my eye!' he said, crying with tears, and repeating the wail a dozen times. I was so relieved that I laughed, hysterically, and his two friends eyed me angrily. Anyway's face was covered in blood from a cut on his eyebrow, and I didn't want to fight any more, but I thought the best way to avoid this was to ask for it; so, turning to the other two, I said, as carelessly as I could, 'He'll be all right in a minute or two; which of you is next?' 'Look at his face! blimey, how it bleeds!' replied one of them, and sure enough it did bleed, but I wanted all the more to get away. 'Which of you is next?' I said again, 'I can't stop here all night!' 'Oh, go on!' cried the third of them, 'we're satisfied!' 'If you really are?' I inquired, politely. 'Go home!' said the other, and I adopted his suggestion. And I can assure you that as soon as I was out of their sight I began to run and didn't stop running until

I reached my own gate." Miss Muffet gave a great sigh of admiration, pleasure, interest—all combined, and with remarkable vision, with which, perhaps, the possession of brothers had helped to endow her, asked:

"What did your mother say?"

"That I was a disgrace to the family."

"And your father?"

"That I might fight as much as I pleased, so long as I didn't mix him up in it."

"Good parents!" I said, "and of course your mother was as proud of you as—as Miss Muffet is," I concluded.

"She felt me all over to see if I had any bones broken!" said George. . . .

"Have you any sisters, Mr Lidney?" asked Enid.

"Three, all married," answered George.

"I should think they would be!" said Enid, enigmatically.

"Why?" asked Miss Muffet.

"If they are as nice as George is!" whispered Enid, pinching Miss Muffet's ear.

"You dear!" said Miss Muffet. . . .

As I passed the kitchen on my way out, I saw

our hostess sitting crooning to her babe, and in my professional manner I approached and expressed due admiration for the baby—he was a very fine chap—giving her some advice. As she did not seem to appreciate this at its value, I mentioned, incidentally, that I was a doctor. She looked me up and down, saying: “*Are* you? just fancy!” And during the day “Just fancy” was a favourite expression of Miss Muffet’s, for of course she had listened and overheard.

As I came from the kitchen I caught sight of a face peering through the window; it was not a nice face to look upon, and it vanished quickly as I looked up—poor Beast! I wonder how long the lesson will serve him? . . .

The pinch from Wiseman’s ferry is the most severe of the whole journey, very steep, with a hairpin bend at the middle of it; but The Locust took it with a smile, and The Ladybird laughed at it! It was very hot, hotter than yesterday, and we slowly climbed the mountain with many expressions of hope that it would be cooler at the top. But it wasn’t; and The Locust was glad of a billycan of water given to us by a dear lady who had a vineyard-farm on the flat mountain-

top. And again, further on at a house to which Enid and I went, we obtained water for The Locust's radiator. Here we were interested to see the bees clustering round the tank tap for the drips. I am very fond of bees, but being afraid that they might sting Enid, getting tangled in her hair, I asked her to stand a little away, while I filled my scooped-up hands, and let the grateful bees drink from them. Boppo got one on his nose as he lapped from the little pool among the stones, and retired to the shelter of Enid's skirt, howling. Provision had been made for the bees' thirst in the shape of an empty tea-tin placed under the tap. But the man who had put it there, (Enid assures me that it could not have been a woman) had not noticed that when the water reached the level of the holes pierced in the tin's side to hold the wire handle, it got no further, but trickled out at these points, so that the surface of the water in the tin was too far down for the bees to drink from safely. I should have liked to tell him, but he was not at home. . . .

It *was* hot! a scorching wind blew in our faces, parching us. We passed two exhausted dogs, overcome by the heat, lying with lolling tongues

and heaving bodies under the sparse shelter of a small gum-tree, waiting for the rain and their master's return. . . but it got hotter and hotter, while on the horizon huge black masses of thunder-storm cloud gathered angrily, and we prophesied hail. Presently there came a faint suggestion of coolness in the wind, and we could see that far away, over Sydney, perhaps, it was raining. Then, as we reached Windsor, and drank refreshing tea in a cool, but close-smelling, little inn, the rain began, slowly, but in great heavy drops; and thinking that we might be in for a drenching, we asked and obtained, a few miles further on, shelter at a roadside cottage, where a little Australian terrier lady flirted violently with Boppo. But as the rain did not increase we boarded The Locust again, and with The Ladybird in close attendance, hurried on. Passing through Paramatta we saw evidences of a great rain-storm in the deep pools of water in the main street. . . . And we saw good old-fashioned milestones, indicating the nearness of old Sydney! (They had been mile-posts hitherto) So, on, through Petersham and Leichhardt where our first real car-accident occurred. A

horrible noise, as though the floor of the car were being smashed in! But it was only that the bolt holding the driving shaft had dropped out; and this was soon put right by the willing mechanic of a near-by garage, who lay on his back in the mud and fixed a new bolt in. . . . And at last, at happy last, we drew up before the hospitable door of Orielson. . . . 648 miles from Tweed Heads. . . . Everyone has gone to bed, all but your happy brother . . . it is early yet, for me, and I may as well tell you now the story of Morland's hold over Enid—if it can be called that . . . such a Beast! I need hardly say that it brings no discredit to Enid, unless the inexperience and credulity of an innocent young girl be accounted a sin. . . . I will tell her story as concisely as I can.

Mr Durston, Enid's father, was one of the old-time squatters, but differed from many of them in that he had not lost the fortune which his sheep had brought him, when in the usual course of events, his run was cut up into smaller selections, he retained the homestead with about five thousand acres, which he used as part sheep-run, part farm, employing only a few hands; and his

fortune grew. He had married rather late in life, and Enid was the only child, her mother dying when she was two years old; and until within three months of her father's death she had lived with him on Gala-galah paying short flying visits to Sydney at long intervals. The old gentleman appears to have awoken rather suddenly to the disadvantages under which his daughter was living, and to have decided to sell out and move to Sydney. Once having made up his mind, he acted promptly, and took a house at Manly for the summer—last summer. But the two were scarcely settled in their new home when Mr Durston had a cerebral hæmorrhage, and died without regaining consciousness. Enid seems to have been very fond of him, though he was a very silent and unapproachable man. She was now left practically alone in the world, for her mother had been an only child, and she knew nothing of her father's relatives except that he had an unmarried sister living in Sydney, of whom he had seldom spoken, and had never taken Enid to see; but for whom he provided generously in his will. Mr Durston's solicitor, Mr Sutton, the father of Miss Muffet, invited

Enid to stay with them until she had time to form other plans. In Mrs Sutton she found a second mother, and under the cheerful influence of Miss Muffet and a houseful of lively boys and girls, (imagine a family of Miss Muffet's!) she quickly lost much of that bush shyness which characterises many of the finest of our Australian daughters. Enid had been settled in her new home for six weeks, growing happier with the passage of each day, when her aunt, Miss Durston, called to see and claim her. This lady explained that she had been away from Sydney at the time of her brother's death, and had been unable to get home sooner. Under the golden influence of her greater prosperity she was very genial, and invited Enid very cordially to make her house her home. Though Enid says little of her aunt, I have judged that she is a silly sentimental spinster with a mania for match-making, for in giving her invitation she had added with a giggle and simper, "until we get you married, my dear!" She seems to have regarded Enid as her great opportunity, and with foolish eagerness introduced her "heiress-niece"—("She always called me that when she introduced me

to new people," Id had said, "and I did hate it so!") to all and sundry of her bachelor acquaintance, who were a queer assortment, and whose numbers grew greater with the news of the increase in her income. Among these was a good-looking, and plausible scoundrel, a recent arrival from England. He was apparently of good family, and certainly of good address. Miss Durston, who "adored Englishmen," had seized upon this man Thorner as the means of effecting a match for her "heiress-niece," and had used every opportunity to bring the two together. It is difficult to tell this part of the sordid story. . . . It was punctuated with sobs when the dear girl told it to me on the bank of the river at St Albans; was it yesterday? . . . It comes to this, that Enid, driven into the mistake by her aunt's silly notions of romance, and urged by the incessant importunity of the honey-tongued Thorner, had after much persuasion, consented, not only to marry him, but to do so privately. . . . I know this must read to you as though she were a foolish, sentimental girl—you shall see her for yourself soon, and judge if she be so. Enid's great mistake, of course, was in not seeking the advice of

Mrs Sutton, but she was deterred from doing so, partly by the protestations of her aunt, one of whose favourite expressions at the time was that "blood was thicker than water, my dear!" and partly by her shy fear of bothering her newly-made friends. And Thorner appears to have been a well-educated and consummate actor and villain. . . . They were married, then, one morning, at the office of a Registrar, a matter of great simplicity in Australia, where notice or special licences are not required. Moreover Enid was of age. After the ceremony Enid had returned, alone, to her aunt's house, this lady receiving her with a great show of cordiality and speaking in whispers, as though marriage were something unannouncable. . . . Enid glossed this over, but I imagine that her aunt's whispered hints were not in the best of taste. . . . "It was her whisperings, continued through the day, that first made me feel shame for what I had done," Id had said; though she had had a shock of distrust when, after the wedding, Thorner had asked her to sign a cheque, which he had made out, for a thousand pounds, explaining that there had been an unexpected delay in the arrival of his rent-money,

and pointing out that the tradesmen would treat them more liberally if they paid cash for their furniture, etc. She had done this, signing inadvertently with her maiden name, and when she laughingly pointed out her mistake, Thorner had said that the Bank would not recognise her yet under her new name. With many expressions of devotion, he had bidden her *Au revoir!* and directed the driver of her taxi to take her to her aunt's house. He, no doubt, hurried off, to place the cheque to the credit of his own account. . . . I expect that you will think that I am going to say now that this was the last that Enid saw of Thorner? I thought this, though I had not grasped how she could still be calling herself Miss Durston, and in my interest in her sad story, I had forgotten the Beast. . . . Thorner turned up in the early afternoon and found Enid alone. Miss Durston with her ever ready simper had said that she was going to spend an hour or two at a friend's house, (whispering?) but that she would be back in time "to bid them Good-bye." Very soon after Thorner's arrival, Morland was shown into the room. Of course the servants knew nothing. Enid had often

seen Morland at the houses where she had met Thorner, and had always disliked and feared him, for some reason which she could not define. ("I do not like you, Dr Fell") but when he came into the room now she felt almost grateful to him, for Thorner's manner had changed since the morning. He was not drunk, but he had been drinking. He greeted Morland heartily, effusively even, and behaved towards Enid, though she would not let him touch her, in such a proprietary sort of way that Morland seems to have drawn his conclusions—"he looked at me so queerly, with a kind of contemptuous pity, that I began to get afraid, I hardly know of what," Enid said; and while she was at the further end of the room she heard Morland say. "Send the little fool out of the room for a minute!" and Thorner, speaking less guardedly, but in a loud whisper, replied, "Send five thou' a year out of the room? not me, my boy!" and Enid, quite frightened now, slipped away. Her first impulse was to leave the house at once, for she was filled with a kind of instinctive dread that there was something wrong, which her aunt's continued absence did not help to dispel. Then

she suddenly resolved upon a brave and wise plan. . . . The drawing-room, in which she had left the two men, was separated from the dining-room by folding doors, which, meeting unevenly in the middle, allowed light and sound to pass. She entered the dining-room, and with quickened pulse approached the folding doors. It was not late enough for the gas to have been lighted, but the drawing-room, being better provided with windows than the dining-room, was lighter, so that she could see plainly without much chance of being seen. She could just discern the two men, and could hear every word they said, for neither, now, made any attempt to lower his voice. The servant had taken in the decanter and glasses when Morland arrived, and both men were drinking. And a horrible tale it was that was revealed to her. Some of this she learned afterwards. Thorner and Morland had travelled from England together, and, birds of a feather, they had foregathered early in the voyage, and had formed some kind of infernal partnership. But Thorner, apparently from selfish motives, had not told Morland of his intention to marry Enid; but the whole thing came out now under

the artful questioning of Morland, aided by the drink which the latter was pressing upon the other. Thorner, getting boastful in his cups, chuckled with fiendish delight at having secured "a thousand pounds already," and Morland asked where he came in, demanding a half share. "I don't want any of the girl," he said, (and I wished that I had hit him harder) "but I want my share of the oof." Thorner refused to part with more than a hundred pounds, and Morland said. "All right, how about Alice, then? I know too much, my son!" and Thorner swore. Then they began to quarrel more unreservedly, till Morland finally threatened to "blow the whole gaff," and tell Enid that Thorner was already married, if the latter did not shell out. Enid did not wait to hear more, but putting on a hat and cloak, fled from the house, tearing off her ring and flinging it in the gutter, and crossing the city, *bought a revolver, the* revolver, caught a Manly boat, and hastening to Mrs Sutton's house poured out her story of ignorant impetuosity, and its fatal results. "But, Aston, I am so glad, so glad to think that I never let him kiss me, not even when we were married; I don't know why, but I was half afraid

of him all the time, and very shy. . . . I am so glad now, dear." And I tried, with my lips, to help her to forget. . . . Enid stayed at the Sutton's house that night, but on the following day, acting on the advice of Mr Sutton, she went to the Blue Mountains, taking Miss Muffet, who was not told anything, with her; the lawyer telling her that it might be better for him not to know her address for the present. It was while they were at Katoomba that Id became the possessor of Boppo, whom she bought at an auction sale of household effects! As Mr Sutton had expected, Miss Durston went to his office on the day after Enid's flight, to ask if he knew where she was, and he was able to say with legal truth that he did not. Of course, Miss Durston had no sort of guardianship claim over Enid, but Enid naturally wished to have as little as possible to do with her silly aunt in the future. After "hiding" for some months in that very beautiful part of N. S. Wales, the two girls had returned to Sydney, and almost immediately afterwards, started in The Ladybird for Brisbane, under the chauffeurship of John, and with Boppo and the revolver as protectors. They had gone by way

of New England and the Darling Downs, and were on their way back by the Northern Rivers when our story began! . . . Meanwhile Mr Sutton had been busy in her interests, and had ascertained that Thorner was indeed married, and that his wife "Alice" was still living in England with Thorner's people. Acting upon Mr Sutton's advice Enid did nothing, being very content to avoid any revival of her unpleasant memories. Thorner, it was learnt, was in Melbourne, spending his stolen money freely, but Morland's whereabouts Mr Sutton had not troubled to discover. Morland, thinking that Enid would be glad to keep the knowledge of that evil day hidden, had kept his eyes open, and seeing in a newspaper that she was motoring, kept watch on her movements—a matter sufficiently easy in Australia where the "social column" of the newspaper chronicles the domestic affairs of anyone and almost of everyone! He had gone to Port Macquarie to await her arrival there, with the express purpose of levying blackmail; and to some extent he had succeeded, for Enid had "lent" him ten pounds, and in the hope of obtaining more, he had determined to accompany

her to Sydney. The presence of George and myself in Enid's party had annoyed him, and his attempt to corrupt William was evidently made in the hope that, The Locust being incapacitated for the road, Enid and Miss Muffet and he would go on in The Ladybird, leaving George and me behind. Good old William!

"But why did you ask me to let the Beast come with us?" I asked, when her sad story was at last told.

"He threatened me that he would tell you; and Oh, Aston, dear, I was getting so happy, I was—I was beginning to love you: and I did so want to go on in the dear Locust, so I promised him that he should come with us."

"You dear!" I said.

"And Aston, I did cry that night, so!"

"You shall never cry again, my darling, if I can help it! Why, you're crying now!"

"But this is with—with joy," she said. . . . And so her story ended . . . but ours can never end. . . it is just beginning. To-morrow, no! to-day, she will become Enid Perry, and I shall have for wife the dearest, most beautiful little, little girl in all the glad world. . . .

Good night Amy, my dear sister—what long letters! what an unexpected account of my motor-trip! . . . Good night.

Your loving brother,

Aston.

CHAPTER XIV

S.S. Wyandra, *Dec. 4th*, 1909

My dear Amy,

Id and I were married quietly yesterday morning, George acting as "best man" to me, and Miss Muffet as sole bridesmaid to Id. Mr Sutton gave her away, and Mrs Sutton and old Miss Durston, (who simpered and smirked as though she were being married herself and were very shy about it, and to whom I have not taken a very violent liking) were the only persons present in the church, persons who count, that is, except William and John, and, don't tell anyone, Boppo on the chain! William drove Id and me (and Boppo) in the worn-looking Locust, (I wore my button!) and the rest of the party John drove in The Ladybird. We drove back to Orielton and had a jolly meal together, after which they left us, and we took the train to Coogee. Miss Durston

was the only one of the ladies who shed tears, and hers were of the crocodile order. William took The Locust to the wharf—she is in the hold below—and John drove the others home. Boppo, of course, came with us! George is going to stay with the Sutton's that they may make his acquaintance, Mr Sutton having already made that of "G. L.". . . Yesterday evening Id and I went to see Oscar Asche and Lily Brayton in their great performance of Othello, and Miss Muffet and George were sitting alongside of us! George and I had promised ourselves this treat at the end of The Locust's cruise, and Id insisted that the mere incident of a marriage with her should not cause us to be disappointed! To-day at 6.30. p.m. we came on board the comfortable *Wyandra*; of course George and Miss Muffet, looking supremely happy, came to see us off. William is on board somewhere, probably in the engine-room if he isn't guarding The Locust from rats. John has been paid off. Boppo is whimpering in his kennel, aft.

Brisbane, *Dec. 6th*

Back home after a very calm and delightful

passage and no meals missed. Very busy. We have decided that I shall take a year's holiday, honeymoon! English and Continental hospitals, and ENGLAND. We shall get to Sydney in time for Miss Muffet's wedding on New Year's Day, and then heigh for the open sea and continued happiness! We shall take William with us, and, of course, Boppo. . . . Before I forget it, I want to call your especial attention to the fact that during the whole journeying of The Locust we saw only six Australian aborigines (did I mention them at the time?) five young men together near Grafton, and one old jinn at Kempsey. . . . I shall write to you again before we leave, but I think that you have done fairly well by me during the last few days? don't you?

Good-bye, Amy, dear; Enid joins me in love to you. Prepare James and the youngsters for our coming!

Aston.

P.S.—I enclose "for your interested perusal" a cutting from a Sydney paper.

A. P.

CHAPTER XV

CUTTING from the *Sydney Morning Courier* of Dec. 3rd, 1909, referred to in chapter xiv:—

THE STROUD BURGLARY

A GALLANT DEED

THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED

WHAT appears to be the explanation of the mystery of the Stroud Burglary has been learned by one of our reporters. It will be remembered that the local Stroud constable, in response to an anonymous letter which he found thrust under his door on the morning of Wednesday last, visited a house in the town, and found lying securely bound upon the floor of one of the rooms the notorious house-breaker Brown *alias* Frederick, etc., who has already served two if not three sentences for burglary; and by the man's side a sack containing the contents of

the safe and a quantity of valuable plate the property of Mr Ferguson, C.P.S. Mr Morland, an English gentleman who is paying a visit to Australia, called at our office late last night and told his very interesting story. He states that on Tuesday evening he arrived at Stroud in his motor-car en route from Tweed Heads to Sydney, that making early on Wednesday morning, and going to the verandah of the hotel for a breath of fresh air, his attention was attracted by a man carrying a sack who appeared to be in a hurry to leave the neighbourhood, and thinking that there was something suspicious about the man's movements, he followed and questioned him. The man's answer was to throw down his sack and to furiously attack Mr Morland. After a severe and prolonged struggle the man was overpowered, and actually bound with cord obtained from the sack. Mr Morland bears the evidence of the vicious nature of the encounter, in two badly blackened eyes, a broken nose, for which he has received attention from one of our leading surgeons, and other less serious injuries, of a contusion the size of an emu's egg at the back of his head may be thus described. Mr

Morland explains that his reason for concealing at the time his part in the capture of the ruffian was that he had very important business in Sydney, and did not wish to be detained in Stroud. For this reason he wrote the letter anonymously which led to the visit of the constable to Mr Ferguson's house. He himself left Stroud quietly, and reached St Albans that same evening. Here an accident occurring to his car, the result of the chauffeur's reckless driving down Mount Manning, he took boat from Wiseman's ferry, and reached Sydney yesterday. Having no further object in concealing his identity he called upon us to tell his story of heroism, which he did with becoming modesty. Being confronted with Mr Morland, the prisoner, whom Mr Morland picked out from among a dozen other malefactors, volubly denied that Mr Morland had had anything to do with his capture. "There was two blokes," he said, "a big bloke as talked a lot, and a little bloke as druv the car. It was the big bloke as copped me, 'e 'ad a gun." But this manifest attempt to hide the truth will not weigh with the thinking public, or, we should think, with an intelligent jury. There can be no

doubt that Mr Morland deserves more than a small compensation for his serious injuries, and it is to be hoped that the Government will suitably reward him for his gallant capture of a dangerous enemy to the safety of the householder.

! ! !

CHAPTER XVI

From Mrs Aston Perry to Miss Sutton

Brisbane, *Dec. 11th*, 1909

My dear old Muffie,

I have been so happy that I haven't had a moment for you except the postcard which I sent you when we reached Brisbane, and the telegram. I am being made so much of that I am getting vain—vain of my husband. We dined at Government house on Tuesday and you should see the presents! including one from his Excellency! do you wonder that I am becoming vain? Aston is thought so much of! Isn't he a dear humble man? but I know you love him, too. I used to be a little jealous of you sometimes, at first—do you believe that? We shall be quite sorry to go away from so many friends, but—why do you think? Because! Brisbane is such a much prettier place than I thought when you and

I were here together! I go with Aston on his rounds every morning, (he has a most efficient and devoted housekeeper, so I have nothing to do) we use *The Locust*, what matter if it is travel-stained and old-fashioned? and William seems very proud to drive us. . . . I try to make the stops seem short by reading a book when Aston is with a patient, but——!

The news of Aston's bravery at Port Macquarie has just reached Brisbane, and of course, the newspapers are making much of it, and of him. He says that he supposes the Ceylon papers will have got it by the time we reach Colombo, and then the English papers and so on. I am never tired of reading about it! I have ordered a most *lovely* frock for your wedding, so take care that you look nice, you dear little Muffie. Aston had a wire from George to-day saying that he had secured good berths for us and for you two children, and for William and Boppo. *Did he tell you?* Don't you think it a pity we can't take *The Locust*? But Aston says he must get something more up-to-date for England; but we are going to take *The Ladybird*, and if we get out at Naples, you may come

with us across Europe if you are good, and we haven't quarrelled. Do you think we shall? The Locust is going to be thoroughly done up, and will be waiting for us here when we come back. I am not going to let Aston part with the dear old Locust, *ever*. I hope you will like our present. Shall I tell you what it is? No, I won't, so there! Good-bye, you dear thing. *Give my love to George*, and with Aston's love and mine,—

I am your loving

Id Perry (doesn't it look nice?).

CHAPTER XVII

From Mr George Lidney to Dr Aston Perry

Manley, Sydney, *Dec. 11th*, 1909

Dear Aston,

I know that you will be interested to learn how we are getting on, Miss Muffet and I. We are in excellent health, and she, at least, is very busy. I wonder how much you remember of the Sutton family? It would be difficult to forget them! My reception has been most kind and cordial. At first Mrs Sutton seemed to regard me as an enemy, and really, I don't know how a mother can bring herself to let her children go; it is no wonder that at weddings tears are mingled with smiles. Mrs Sutton has cried a good deal, but is more reconciled now. She knew, she says, that she would have to part with Elsie some day, but she did not think that it would have been so soon. Poor mother! Mr

Sutton and I hit it off very well. I had rather a terrible interview with him in his office on the morning after your wedding—all about settlements and that sort of worldly thing; of course I was able to give him satisfactory references and so on, but he seems to be peculiarly suspicious of travelling Englishmen. When I had satisfied him he shook hands with me, and his manner changed abruptly from that of the lawyer to that of the father of Miss Muffet; and he is wonderfully like her! his fun is as spontaneous as hers, nearly, and his laugh reminds one pleasantly of Elsie. Do you remember Olive? the Baby aged four? She has the largest, most serious eyes I ever saw. She stares at me with them until I blush and fidget. You may have noticed Miss Muffet's laugh, how she draws her shoulders together and gives her head a little screw-turn before the sound comes. Olive appears to enjoy seeing this as much as some older people. For she will make Miss Muffet sit on the floor in front of her, and she will suddenly say, "Laugh!" and Miss Muffet has to obey, and then the youngster with preternatural gravity says "Again!" and the per-

formance must be repeated. Olive tried this on me, once, but only once, my laughter not proving sufficiently entertaining to merit an encore. This morning Elsie came to me and said that she had something she wished to show me upstairs, and I went with her to the nursery. She opened the door very quietly and revealed little Olive sitting on a hassock (the same tuffet that gave Miss Muffet her name when she was a baby), nursing a boy-doll, and singing in an entrancing lisp my lullaby, which Elsie had taught her! I couldn't see the child for a while, for mist. But the twins, Randolph and Edward! you cannot possibly have forgotten them! They are 10, and Heaven preserve me from what they will be at 14. The first day that I was here they were satisfied to look at me—which in itself is disconcerting to a shy man when continued throughout a long meal—and when I spoke, they nudged each other, and looked harder. Mrs Sutton, in the wild hope of inspiring respect for me, had told them that I wrote books and poetry, and they expected, apparently, that I would always speak in rhyme. Randolph, indeed, rose to a flight of inspiration. "I should

have thought that your Christian name would be Sidney," he said. "Why?" I asked, and Miss Muffet pinched me. "'Cause it would rhyme with Lidney!" and the twins had a convulsion of giggling. But their attitude towards me has changed, completely changed. They have no respect for me at all. They regard me as a fraud, and in their hearts suspect me of having palmed off someone else's "stuff" as my own. It began after the first surf-bathe, at which I doffed my years and romped. On the way home, in a weak moment, I told our story of the Stroud burglar; this led to another story, and another still, and more after that. Now the chief desire of the twins' lives is to get back from school in order to ask, "Tell us about the doctor's fight!" (that is the favourite—at a modest computation I have told it fifteen times), or "Tell us about the burglar!" or, when they are particularly anxious to propitiate me, "Tell us about your own fight!" (this last was originally Miss Muffet's suggestion, of course). And so on. But I must get to the real object of my letter. The English mail came in yesterday morning, and among my letters (Mr Sutton had

obtained them for me at the G.P.O. and sent one of his clerks over with them) was one from Peabody of John's, now a barrister with a big practice—you will remember that he was No. 2 in our boat—he asked me to call upon Ransome, who I had forgotten had come to Sydney. As Elsie was going across to see her dressmaker and said that she could spare me for an hour (but I kept her waiting after all, as you shall learn), I left her at the “establishment” of her “costumière,” and went to look for my man. A notice on his door informed me that he was in the Criminal Court; so thither I went, and was directed by a whispering official to the barristers' table. There I found Ransome, and was surreptitiously shaking hands with him when the discreet dignity of the Court was disturbed by a loud shout of “That's 'im—that's the little bloke as the other bloke called ‘George’! (Order, order! silence!) “that's the little bloke as druv the other car and fetched me a drink!” And I saw gesticulating in the prisoners' dock our cheerful friend of Stroud, and in the witnesses' box, Morland! Morland with healing black eyes. Perhaps you have seen in the press

an account of Morland's attempt to secure for himself the kudos of the capture? I had not seen it, for I have not yet found my way further than the London cables about the Sydney newspapers; so the whole thing was a surprise to me, and it took me some time to get my bearings. To make a long story short, Morland, at sight of me, and as a result of my promptings to Ransome, who was defending our burglar, contradicted himself and finally collapsed—he looks beastly ill—and he has been indicted for perjury. I was asked to give my evidence, in which I could not help implicating you, and it created a great sensation. (By the way, the Judge seemed to know of you quite well, he spoke of you as The Dr Aston Perry!). Old "Stroud," through Ransome, then asked to be allowed to change his plea to "guilty," but it didn't help the poor fellow any, for he got penal servitude for life. He was quite cheerful to the end. The trouble now is that we may be needed to appear as witnesses against the Beast, and if so, our plans will be upset very considerably. I have asked Ransome to act with Mr Sutton in the matter, and to do what he can for us, and he says that it

may be arranged that we do not appear if Morland pleads "Guilty." He has done so, practically already, but he is such a Beast that he may change his plea when the time comes, if only to spite you. I hope not. Mr Sutton and Ransome will do all they can, and I have undertaken, *sub rosâ*, to sign a cheque!—Elsie was waiting for me and was quite nice about it! but of course she had to know "why"! She is reading over my shoulder, and every now and then she strokes my shaven cheeks with her soft hand—and how can a man write letters, so? Elsie is writing to Enid, but give her my love, in case Miss Muffet forgets to do so.

I am, yours very sincerely,
George Lidney.

P.S.—I shan't forget. Enid can have all the love she likes from George or me or *you*. She deserves it. Do you think you could give her a kiss for me? Try.

Your loving Miss Muffet.

P.P.S.—Dear Aston,—Elsie does not know that I am adding this, for I do not wish her to know lest it do not come off and she be dis-

appointed. I purpose returning to Australia, with you and Enid—after I have seen my old Governor. You know that I came away in order that Tom should have a chance to get into the Governor's ways. This plan has succeeded beyond expectation, for Tom has settled down completely, and has become Father's right-hand man. He had been a bit intractable, you understand. If this improvement proves permanent, I shall come back here, at least for a few years. The place suits me well, and I have begun to write again. It seems a pity to deprive Miss Muffet's family of her altogether. I shall send you a telegram concerning the Morland matter, as soon as there is anything definite to tell.

G. L.

II

Telegram

Sidney, Dec. 13th.—Satisfactory trial; trial to-day week; you may get subpœna; prisoner undertakes plead guilty; writing.—Lidney.

III

Sydney, *Dec. 13th*, 1909

Dear Aston,

In confirmation of my telegram sent to you

to-day, Morland's trial is to be hurried on and will take place to-day week. You may be called to give evidence, but Mr Sutton thinks that this may be avoided. At any rate you will not have to appear next Monday. Morland, for a considerable consideration (fortunately I am not a J.P.) has undertaken to plead "Guilty." I sincerely hope that he will not go back on his word. His word! Elsie sends love to you both. In great haste to catch train post.

Yours, G. L.

IV

Sydney, *Dec. 20th*, 1909

Dear Aston,

It is all right. He pleaded guilty, and the whole affair lasted only a few minutes. I don't quite know what it means, but he has been let off under the First Offenders' Probationary Act or something of the sort. I wonder how he will spend the cheque? Love from Elsie.

Yours, G. L.

CHAPTER XVIII

From Mrs Aston Perry to Miss Muffet

'Xmas Day, 1909

My dear old Muffie,

You will have received our Christmas greetings, but I am writing again to-day to say that we shall not be able to come down by boat after all. Aston has a case which he does not wish to leave until the last possible moment, so we shall come by train, leaving here on Thursday next, and shall hope to reach Sydney on Friday morning. Aston has engaged one of the new private carriages at e-nor-mous expense! he spoils me dreadfully; and we are going to be allowed to have Boppo with us.

I am not going to write to you again, for I am sure that you have no time to waste on letter-reading? So good-bye, *Miss Sutton*, but not *Miss Muffet*, you will never be anything else but that to us.

Aston sends love and so does

Your loving Id Perry.

P.S.—We think your plan of going to Melbourne by train and joining the boat there an excellent one. I do hope that the sun will shine on New Year's Day: it is raining hard here to-day, and quite cold—

Id.

CHAPTER XIX

LIDNEY—SUTTON.—At St Mark's Church, Manly, on New Year's Day, by the Rev. Arnold Smith, M.A., George, eldest son of George Lidney, Esq., of Haslemere, Surrey, England, to Elsie (Miss Muffet), eldest daughter of Herbert Sutton, Esq., of Manly, N.S. Wales.

THE END

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